

A
DETECTIVE IN ITALY;
OR THE MYSTERY OF BERWYN KENNEDY.
BY HAY FORBES.



263

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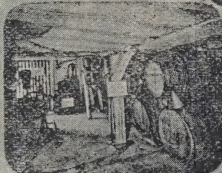
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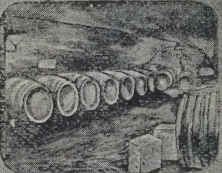


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CURED
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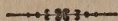
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A

DETECTIVE IN ITALY.



CHAPTER I.

AT THE PAVIA RAILWAY STATION.

"THE train for Milan—is it ready to start?"

"The express train, Excellency?"

"No, the omnibus train."

"It leaves at 1.42; it is the train that carries the convicts. Excellency can see the officers yonder on the next platform."

With a word of thanks the questioner turned away and sauntered across to the platform where the group of *carabinieri* was waiting. They are fine-looking fellows, these Italian policemen—tall and well set up, wearing black uniforms, with red facings and white epaulettes, cocked hats and swords.

"Stand back there—back, I say!" cried one of them, as the crowd of bewildered peasants, hurried travellers, and curious loafers pressed closer.

"My good fellow."

"Well," returned the *carabiniere* sharply.

"Well, *certo*, well," was the angry reply; "let me pass."

"But, Excellency."

"Enough! Will the convicts' carriage draw up here?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"Keep the crowd away; I will remain here."

"Excellency will pardon me. My orders are imperative, and I do not know his Excellency."

At this moment the officer in command approached.

"What is this?" he asked. The stranger stepped close to him and spoke one word.

That word was *MAFIA*.

It reached no ears save those of the officer; he turned abruptly away and gave orders to have the crowd thrust back. The stranger stood unconcerned in the cleared space among the police. He lit a cigarette and smoked indolently, watching the smoke drift away. He overheard two policemen talking.

"Who is it?" asked one.

"He!" the other answered; "*Corpo di Geo*, man! it is Montecinque!

"Of Florence?"

"Ay, of Florence; and if all I hear be true——"

The man called Montecinque turned lazily and faced them; that sentence was never finished.

He was slight and tall, with close-cut grey hair and beard, and a long white moustache, waxed and twisted up at the corners, like goats' horns. He was dressed fashionably in black clothes, and wore no jewellery, save a curious gold ring on the first finger of his left hand. It was cold in Pavia on that October day; a keen wind was blowing up from the marshes of Lomellina. Montecinque wore a heavy fur-lined great-coat, but he wore no gloves. As he fingered his cigarette one could see the curious gold ring. It was made of small links joined together. One would have said that it was made after the pattern of the coarse rivetted chains of the galleys.

"Back there! make way!"

The police drew their swords and forced the crowd back. Then there came a clanking of chains, and a double file of convicts tramped heavily down the platform, bent and stooping under the weight of their irons. Their clothes of coarse, grey canvas, striped with red, hung about them loosely; their bare heads were bowed; they glanced right and left with shifty eyes as they tramped along. Most of them were grey-haired, and their faces had the greenish pallor of the convict. Their wrists and ankles were manacled;

about the waist of each was a chain, and this was made fast to the man in front and the man behind. They stood still in the open space. The guards unfastened the guide-chain. The convicts were chained two and two. This chain connecting each pair was three feet in length.

Montecinqe stood near the officer in command. He pointed to one of the convicts, a haggard, old-looking man, with narrow eyes and a heavy chin. But, in spite of his broken appearance, there was evidently great strength in those dragged limbs and in that broad, bent back.

"There's a fine bird," said Montecinqe, laughing aloud.

"Ay," said the captain; "he'll live to come back again—he's out next week."

The convict looked up and his eyes rested on Montecinqe for a moment. A sudden light came into his face ere he bent it again and listened furtively, but attentively.

"That mate of his will not live long," Montecinqe suggested, carelessly looking at the other convict. The latter was but a boy. His convict garb and his weight of iron could not rob him of the grace and distinction of his bearing. That fine old word gentleman was written in every line of his face—a face that was frank and noble, in spite of its pallor and anguish. With head sunken and eyes half-closed he had stood there until he heard those careless, drawling words. Then he sprang forward, shouting, sobbing in an agony of wrath and despair.

"*Diavolo!*" he screamed; "I will——"

Montecinqe did not move. "He will not live long," he repeated, half to himself.

The *carabiniere* struck the lad with his sword. But the young fellow, mad with passion, tore at his fetters. His fellow-convict, with a sudden jerk, dragged him back to his place. He stood there panting and sobbing, the blood dripping from his gashed wrists.

"No," repeated Montecinqe, "I am sure he will not live long."

The convicts entered the carriage in pairs, holding up their dangling chains, stumbling over the high steps. The youth and his companion were the last pair. The lad, going first, had mounted the three steps and stood in the doorway; his fellow was on the ground. The crowd had

begun to scatter; it was all over. But it was not all over, gentlemen loafers, curious tourists, and babbling peasants! In the affairs of this life we see the end as rarely as the beginning.

There came a scream—an oath. The two convicts fell, struggled, rolled on the rails. Then one got up; this was the old man.

“The young brute tried to kill me—see!” said he, as he held up his bloody hands and looked Montecinqe full in the face.

The other convict lay on the rails, with a gash in his temple; and he was dead. The body was unchained; the train rumbled away with its load of prisoners and *carabinieri* guards.

“They are often killed this way—trying to escape,” said the captain.

“I did not think he would live long,” returned Montecinqe, lighting a cigarette. With a glance at the body he strolled over to the buffet. The express train for Florence did not leave until three o’clock, a porter told him. So he ordered breakfast. The omelette was good; the birds were excellent; the wine was fairish. Signor Montecinqe was well-pleased. And he had good reason to be so. His morning in Pavia had not been ill-spent; that is, if one looked upon it from a Montecinquian standpoint. His thoughts were all agreeable, as the reflections of a man who has gained his point should be. That young convict, dead now, had stood in his way for years. This obstacle was removed; and now, Montecinqe felt, he could pass on without impediment to the goal he had in view. It had been no easy task to get rid of this young fellow; he had the old Rombinino blood in him, and that was fighting blood. History knows that. It was shed at Palermo and Melazzo; it was a Rombinino who led the first troops into Sicily, and it was a Rombinino who thrust the knife into the effete papal state and made Italy. He saw the new country grow to strength, and wisdom, and sound liberty; then he died, and Victor Emmanuel gave him a soldier’s funeral.

General Rombinino left two children—a boy and a girl—to the guardianship of his old friend and fellow-soldier, Montecinqe. There were broad acres on the Tuscan hills, a

palazzo in Florence, and a network of houses and shops on the Soderini side of the Arno, that had belonged to the Rombinino family for generations. These Montecinqe held in fee for his wards. Giulietta, the girl, was sent to a convent school, and Gaetano, her brother, entered the gymnasium at Pavia. He was a merry, fine-spirited boy, not given overmuch to study. But Latin verses are "not all of life." Every one loved the youngster with the bright eyes, the frank laugh and pleasant ways. His guardian, too, took a liking to the lad. He sent for him to Florence; took him to the Pergola when Rossi played; gave him his fill of sweets at Doney's; sent him back to school with a "tip" of grand proportions. After a few years Gaetano entered the university, and did very much as other young students do. Of course he ran in debt—his dog-cart was an undoubted extravagance. But it made no difference; he was rich, or would be rich one day, and his guardian—this excellent Montecinqe—told him that he would advance money to pay all his debts. Gaetano was eighteen; it was the end of his first year. The tradesmen began to press him for money; for a week it rained bills. The lad wrote for money to his guardian, and was summoned to Florence. This good Montecinqe scolded him laughingly.

"Come, how much is it? confess!" he asked. "Well, my dear boy, I do not expect you to tell me *all* your debts—you young rascals never do—but I will give you some money. Will this do?"

He handed his ward twenty notes for a thousand francs each; they were crisp and fresh from the bank.

"It is twice as much as I need," the boy stammered; "I —"

"Nonsense," Montecinqe replied, tapping him on the shoulder; "say no more about it. Dine with me, and to-morrow you shall go back to Pavia, and stop the mouths of those cormorants."

Gaetano went back to Pavia, but *not the next day*.

At an early hour the next morning Montecinqe's servant brought up the coffee. He knocked at the door; there was no answer; then he opened the door and went in. His master lay on the floor half-dressed, in a stupor; there was blood on his shirt, and the rugs were stained with

blood. The writing-table had been broken open, and the papers were scattered about. A doctor was summoned. He found that Montecinqe had been stabbed in the shoulder; the wound was not serious. There was a smell of chloroform in the room. These facts came out at the trial.

At what trial?

At that of Gaetano Rombinino, charged with attempted murder and robbery.

Montecinqe gave his evidence with great reluctance; in fact, it was dragged from him. Gaetano, he said, was deeply in debt; he had advanced money over and over again. That night his ward came to the house unexpectedly and demanded a large sum of money; he had refused; his ward stated that he must have the money, and threatened to get it in some way. Montecinqe went on to say that he went to his room, leaving the young man in the dining-room. He read for an hour, and was on the point of going to bed when there came a knock at the door. He opened it, and admitted Gaetano, who repeated his demand, and received a definite and final refusal then—poor Montecinqe could hardly be prevailed upon to continue—then the youth sprang on him, threw him on the floor and stabbed him. He struggled to get free, but a thick moist cloth was pressed to his face, and he lost consciousness.

This is a synopsis of the evidence of Montecinqe. His servant corroborated it so far as he knew.

The police proved the arrest. On the young man was found a roll of bank-notes—20,000 francs in all.

Montecinqe identified them as his property. He had drawn them from the bank the day of Gaetano's arrival, as he had a considerable payment to make the next day.

Berwyn Kennedy, manager of the Florence branch of the Smithson, Mattheson, & Griffith's Banking Company, confirmed this statement. Evidence was brought forward showing the fast life the prisoner had led, and the need he had of money.

Gaetano's statement was so simple that every one said that of course it could not be true. He asserted that there had been no quarrel, that his guardian gave him the money, that then they dined together, and that he had drunk too

much wine and went to bed very early. And that was all he had to say.

He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

He certainly went back to Pavia.

"Injured fatally by falling from a train while attempting to escape," the official report said, and there was no one to gainsay it. A dead convict does not count for much in Italy.

* * * * *

Signor Montecinqe finished his breakfast and took the train for Florence.

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE MAFIA.

For centuries Italy has been the home of bands of evil-doers. In other countries the criminal as a rule works alone. Sometimes, it may be, he joins with a few of his fellows. But the connection is rarely of long duration. In Italy even to this day the government has failed to stamp out brigandage. It lurks in Neapolitan hills and Calabrian valleys. To be sure, its old pride and strength is broken; the *Fra Diavolos* of ballad and fireside story are gone for ever. But they have left a heritage of hatred for law, and order, and government. More than this. They have given birth to half a dozen societies, strong and secret, banded together for crime.

The chief of these is the MAFIA.

In fact, within the last five years it has absorbed all the other societies.

At present, there is hardly a city in any part of the world where its name is not known. Throughout Italy its power is feared. It makes laws in America—in the thronged quarters of lower New York, in the factories of Mexico, and in the mines of Peru. Its orders are obeyed in London and Paris, as well as they are in Rome. It has its own code and its own penalties.

It is a universal Vehmgericht.

There are scores of well-informed cosmopolitan people who will laugh at this.

The *Mafia*!

“A band of ragged cut-throats and ticket-of-leave men—that is all.”

But the police know better; there is not a great city that has not a band of them, strong enough to defy the law, or shrewd enough to defeat it. In London they rob; in Rome

they assassinate; in America they make war. The *Mafia* has its agents everywhere, from the drawing-room to the beggars' lodging-house. Of course, the greater part of its members are bandits, thieves, convicts, ruffians of the lowest type. But there are others—men who use their good positions to direct this brutish force.

Every now and then it is dragged into light—in this land or that; then it sinks again out of sight, and works silently in the dark.

It was a week after the death of Gaetano Rombinino, the convict.

There was a bleak wind blowing over Florence. The *caffés* blazed with light, but there were few people in the streets, and a closed carriage that rolled easily along the Lungarno and crossed the Ponte S. Trinitá attracted no attention. The horses, of the short-legged, rough-coated Tuscan breed, trotted sturdily on; through the Porta Romana, and up the long steep hill toward the little village of Galluzzo.

Within the carriage were Montecinqe, and a young girl. She had been weeping, but now her face was set and her eyes were bright and hard. It was such a face as Andra del Sarto, that perfect painter, loved to depict in the bloom of perpetual girlhood. The straight nose had that "lip-tilted" tendency that has received the approval of the Laureate; the mouth was small and full-lipped; the eyes were deep and wide—haunted with shifting lights and shadows.

"It is a terrible tale to tell to one so young and bright," Montecinqe was saying, "and I have kept it from you as long as I could, but now that you have left the convent, and must mix with the world, it is necessary that you should know your poor brother's sad story."

But the story that Montecinqe told was one the world had never heard. He suppressed all his own share in the conviction of Gaetano.

"I did all I could to save him," he went on; "I could not believe him guilty."

"And I," broke in the young girl, "*know* he is not guilty."

"At the time the evidence seemed very strong."

"Who were the witnesses?"

"There was only one witness of any importance—Berwyn Kennedy, a bank manager. It was on his evidence that poor Gaetano was found guilty of robbery."

"The man lied!" the girl said fiercely; "he lied! You should have told them he lied! You know my brother would not rob any one—and rob *you*! Oh, it is an infamous lie!"

Montecinque hesitated a moment before replying. Then he told Giulietta that her brother was in prison for robbery; he told her nothing of the alleged assault, nothing that could reflect discredit on himself, nothing of what had happened at the station in Pavia.

"Giulietta," he said, very tenderly, laying his hand on her arm, "are you strong and brave? can you be very brave for his sake? Shall I tell you the end?"

"The end?" she repeated fearfully.

"Yes, dear Giulietta. It is too late to save him; we can only avenge him."

She put her hands to her face and sat perfectly still. At last she moaned bitterly and sobbed, "It broke his heart—dear God! it broke his heart!"

"My child," he said, "there is more—he was innocent. That man lied. Day and night I have watched and worked. I have followed every clue. To-day I know the truth—that man Kennedy lied."

"Yes, he lied," she repeated mechanically.

"But you do not understand—he has not been punished."

"You have not killed him yet?" she asked abruptly; "and yet you know everything."

"If he were given up to the law, and if we could prove his perjury," Montecinque went on reflectively, "he would be imprisoned for a number of years."

"And so Gaetano is dead," the girl said quietly, but with the awful quiet that comes from despair.

"I am taking you to a number of old friends of your father's. We will tell them our story. We will ask their aid."

Giulietta did not reply; she was thinking—thoughts that terrified her came upon her. She saw Gaetano dead in a

cell; she saw a man—he was blackened by a lie, and she knew that she must kill him. Again she saw Gaetano when he was a boy, and the dark curls were all about his face as he stooped and kissed her. And she thought sadly of herself, as of one who was dead too. And had she not died yesterday when the doors of the convent closed behind her? She had thought the world was glowing with sunshine and bright with flowers and jewels, but the world was a tomb. Then, again, she saw a man,—that man who had lied,—and she knew she must kill him.

The carriage rolled under a low archway and stopped. There was a dark courtyard where a torch flared, and beyond was a brick-floored room, where three or four men sat at a wooden table drinking wine. At the side of the court a narrow staircase led to the rooms above; at the foot was a heavy door, rivetted with iron, which Montecinqe pushed open. He mounted the staircase and Giulietta followed him. At the head of the stairs was a large, low room, dimly lighted with candles. There were ten men in this room. Montecinqe made the eleventh. In the half-light that came from the dull fire and the flickering candles one could not recognise a face or figure. No one spoke as Montecinqe led his ward to a chair by the fireplace. Then he turned to the men.

“I have told you,” he said, “that I need you, that your old friend’s daughter needs you; will you listen?”

He repeated the story of Gaetano’s trial, and imprisonment, and death as he had told it to Giulietta, but he told it in words that burned.

Indignation, and pity, and rage struggled in his voice; his eyes were one moment filled with tears, the next they were hard with hatred. There were murmurs of sympathy from the dark shadows in the room. Giulietta sat without moving, listening, her face set like that of a statue.

“Law!” Montecinqe concluded; “there is no law that can give us justice—a life for a life! Giulietta,” he added, “these men are old soldiers, friends they were of your dead father; they are friends of mine. We are a band of brothers; banded together to right the wrong and do justice on the unjust. Each for all, and all for each. If a life is asked of us we give it. We have sworn the oath—I swore it

with your father's hand in mine. You are a weak girl, but we will avenge your brother."

Giulietta stood up.

"No," she said clearly, firmly, "I am not weak; I am my father's daughter."

Montecinqe spoke in a whisper to one of the men, and then coming close to the girl, he took her hand in his.

"Will you swear the oath your father swore?"

"I will," she said, in a low voice.

"And I," Montecinqe went on with a suppressed earnestness that thrilled her, "and I will avenge his son."

There in the dusk room, by the flickering firelight, among those shadows that did not seem like men, she swore the oath of the *Mafia*—the oath that has never been written, and has never been betrayed. She was white and trembling, but resolute. One by one the men came forward and took her hand. The last of these was an old-looking man, with narrow eyes, a heavy chin, and his pallid complexion seemed like that of a dead man.

When his hand touched her she shuddered and drew back. Montecinqe noticed this.

"He too has been in prison," he whispered, "and unjustly."

There was one more act in the teeming tragedy that was being played to this audience of one.

Perhaps such an elaborate plot was not necessary to entrap a simple girl, whose whole life had been passed in the seclusion of a convent, but Montecinqe did everything thoroughly. He was an artist for art's sake.

In this case he had a great deal at stake. There was the Rombinino fortune, and for an impecunious man like Montecinqe this was no slight thing. He had helped himself freely to it already, and had no intention of letting the rest slip through his fingers. It seemed to him that it would be enough to entangle Giulietta in the web of the *Mafia*. That done, he had nothing to fear. At first he had merely dragged in Berwyn Kennedy as a stalking-horse, behind which he could bag his game—Giulietta and her fortune. But fate—and fate is often kind to gentlemen who juggle with justice in the Montecinquian fashion—had shown him a double reason for Kennedy's death. Mr. Kennedy

did not seem to be a very important person, but Montecinque had looked underneath the placid Scotch exterior, and come to the conclusion that he was decidedly valuable, but only like the seal—when dead.

Then in this room above the little Tuscan *trattoria* the curtain rose for the last act of the play of "The Spider and the Fly."

"The man must die," said a voice.

"Let the lots be cast," Montecinque replied.

One by one the papers were unfolded.

The one that Giulietta drew was marked with a blotch of red; the others were blank. The spirit of the *Mafia* was upon her; the cry of blood for blood rang in her ears; she cried out excitedly, "It is I! it is I! I shall avenge my brother!"

No one spoke.

But Montecinque glanced at the man with the pallid face, and smiled furtively.

The girl's wild mood passed. She caught her guardian's arm and begged him to take her away: she was ill; she must go home. He assisted her, half-unconscious, to the carriage. During the drive she cowered in the corner; Montecinque was wise enough to leave her to her own thoughts. He knew that words would only dispel the impressions of that carefully-arranged "curtain."

When he left her at the door of the *pension* that had been her home for a few days he spoke to her—two words.

"Remember! Gaetano!"

She did not answer; perhaps she did not hear.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN AND MRS. HEATHCOTE AT HOME.

"*Tous les chats sont gris par nuit*," Balzac says somewhere or other. But the philosopher must have worn smoked glasses.

By night things have a fantastic appearance: the dull colours of everyday life flare into red and crimson; the common-place gives way to the heroical. It is daylight that turns cats and ambitions, heroisms and housetops grey.

Giulietta did not sleep that night. Again and again she dozed off feverishly. But there came always something that startled her into wakefulness; it was the torch flaring in the courtyard of the *trattoria*, or a shadow that was dark and uncertain, or a voice that said, "The man must die." But these were all of the stuff that dreams are made of. With daylight came things more real. She sat by the window and looked out across the sandy Arno; the sunlight was already on the hills, and she watched it creep down into the valleys and blaze on San Spirito.

Her thirst for vengeance had not abated; her purpose had not slackened. She must kill the man whose lie had slain her brother. She repeated this to herself again and again. But in the morning light everything seemed so different. The act stood out; the motive shrank back.

It is not easy to kill.

That is the heritage that Cain has left.

The naked act appalled her. She saw herself with a knife in her hand; she saw a corpse at her feet—it seemed to her as though it were the body of the man who "had been in prison too, unjustly."

Then she roused herself and walked up and down the room hurriedly, impatiently. She devised countless plans

and picked them all to pieces. She built them up laboriously, as one builds card-houses, and they fell at a breath.

No, it is not easy to kill.

A maid brought in the morning coffee. Giulietta did not turn towards her. When the servant left the room the young girl went to the mirror and scanned her face attentively, curiously. She wondered if her secret were written in her face; she felt it must be in her eyes.

"I cannot meet Madame Heathcote," she thought; "she will read it all in my eyes."

The day went all too quickly, and yet when the first dinner-bell rang through the great house Giulietta was in the same uncertain, fearful state. Decision is simple enough; the means baulk every one. No railroads run to the Righi-tops of crime or heroism. The young girl knew that she must appear at dinner. It was better to meet Madame Heathcote there than alone, and at that moment this one friend of hers stood for all the outside world.

She dressed herself and went down. Strength had come with the occasion, and she was impassive, calm, self-centered.

There were a number of people in the dining-room—French and English tourists, and a few *habitués* who had settled down into the indolent life of a Florentine *pension* years before, and had never been able to extricate themselves. And the "Pension Bellini" was eminently attractive; it blended the best qualities of the country-house and the summer hotel: there was homeliness and variety. These facts doubtless influenced Captain Heathcote and his charming wife when they selected this as a Florentine home, but Giulietta came merely because her one friend set her the example. During one of her school vacations she had made Mrs. Heathcote's acquaintance, and the brilliant woman of the world had been charmed with the serious little girl, with her quaint convent manners. More than this. She had befriended her in many little ways—as a woman can so easily do.

Giulietta took her place at the table, but the two seats next to her were vacant. Neither Captain Heathcote nor his wife made their appearance. This was a relief to the girl. It did away with the need of conversation.

The dinner—like an Alexandrine—"dragged its slow length along."

In the meantime, a conversation, that, although it was domestic, had all the elements of interest, took place in Captain Heathcote's handsome apartments on the second piano.

His wife was a bright little lady. Those were the words in which every one described her. Her eyes were grey, and shallow, and quick—like those of a canary-bird. Her features were fine and small—not regular, but fascinating. At all events, very young men always called them fascinating. A mass of fluffy short curls fell about her face, and hid the lines and angles that thirty years had made. She was all youth and gaiety, and her laugh rippled like a bird's note. This night she wore a dull, maroon-coloured tea-gown. She lay in an easy-chair, indolent, *insouciant*, attractive.

"You have much imagination," she said; "why can't you take the world as it is, and wait for things to happen. Now I am philosophical—I never trouble myself about the future."

"Nor the past?" her husband asked meaningly.

"No," she answered, shrugging her shoulders, "nor about the past. '*Che sarà, sarà.*' Poor boy! why do you let fancies worry you? Let us forget the past."

"It is the future of which I think," her husband broke in impetuously, "and I fear——"

She interrupted him.

"And I," she said, "fear nothing until it comes. I am philosophical."

There are many canary-bird philosophers like Mrs. Heathcote, who fancy that because the sun shines to-day there will be no east wind to-morrow.

Captain Heathcote stood on the hearthrug, his hands behind him, his head bent. He was not old, but time had dealt unkindly with him. His forty years might have been sixty. His hair was greyish and thin; there were lines and shadows on his face. He gave one the impression of a man who had seen much, suffered much, perhaps sinned much. But he was a gentleman. Of that there was no doubt. In his case that ill-used word was eminently in place. He smiled sadly at his wife's light remark.

"Dearest," he said, "this is a trouble that must be always feared, and one that must be faced sooner or later."

"But think of the many years that have passed," she said, with pretty petulance. "Please, don't bother me! I must dress for dinner."

"The years that have passed," he repeated; "yes, I think of them always. I cannot endure it any longer. If he would come to me, and strike me in the face, and say, 'Here is a blow to be answered'! If he would speak and tell it all to the world! If he would do his worst—oh, my God!—I could endure it all. But he hangs over my life like a black cloud, silent, motionless, threatening. There is red lightning in it, but it——"

Mrs. Heathcote laughed her dainty laugh.

"Don't be so ridiculous, Reginald," she said; "you are as bad as the witches of Macbeth, with your clouds and lightnings, and one knows not what. Had Berwyn Kennedy intended to do anything, he would have done it years ago. You are very foolish."

"And has he done nothing?" her husband returned, with growing passion; "has he not haunted us everywhere? Where have we not wandered? In what corner have we not hidden ourselves? And he has been with us always—silent, implacable, waiting like fate."

"Well, my dear boy," said Mrs. Heathcote, with the air of a tom-tit Dr. Johnson, settling a question for ever, "as long as he is silent, as you say, it can make no possible difference to us. He never comes near us, and I think that is very nice of him."

She got up and pulled down his face, and kissed him merrily.

"Now be a good boy," she added, "or we shall be late for dinner."

Captain Heathcote sighed, but his face brightened for a moment as she kissed him. He looked at his watch.

"It is nearly eight o'clock," he said. "Edna dear, I did not know it was so late. You have missed your dinner. Never mind. Come with me to Doney's—up to nine o'clock one can dine well there."

Mrs. Heathcote donned her trim gown—the cloth one, olive-green—and in a few moments was ready.

As they passed the door of the drawing-room, where every one met every one else of an evening, she paused.

"Reggie dear, I must go in for a moment and see if my poor, forsaken Giulietta will forgive me for deserting her this evening. What a wretch I am! I've not seen her all day!"

She pushed open the door, and went in, and her husband followed her. At first sight the drawing-room seemed deserted. There was a new opera at the Teatro Nuovo, and M. Tout le Monde and Mme. La Femme were there.

But as Captain and Mrs. Heathcote entered the room Giulietta came toward them.

"Bless you, my dear!" Mrs. Heathcote cried volubly; "and are you here all alone? You poor, deserted darling! And where is everybody? Oh, Reginald! how could you forget it—Mascagni's new opera to-night! And you, my poor, desolate forsaken angel, left here all alone! Oh what a wretch I am! Reggie, we must all go; and we can have a jolly little supper afterwards. Giulietta and I will run upstairs and dress—it will not take us a minute—and then——"

"Pardon, *capitano*; a card."

A little old man, wizened and apologetic, came forward with a salver. He had been Captain Heathcote's servant for many years—twenty years in fact. The Captain had picked him up when he made the "grand tour" as a youngster, and had kept him ever since. Tito Ciuti was faithful, and a wise man never parts with a faithful servant.

Captain Heathcote read the card, and his face grew pale. He handed it to his wife.

"At last," he said, drawing his breath in hard, and standing erect.

"Well!" his wife answered, and she shrugged her shoulders, and tossed the card on the table; "a moment ago you wished for—what was it?—red lightning. *Le voici!* Tito, show the gentleman in here!"

"Edna, you forget—we are not alone!" He glanced at the young girl, who had seated herself at the farther end of the room.

"All the better," she replied. "Tito, show the gentleman into this room!"

Berwyn Kennedy crossed the threshold.

The two men looked at each other, but neither spoke.

Then Mrs. Heathcote came forward. Her eyes glittered strangely, and her hands fluttered nervously; there was an unnatural animation about her.

"I—we—why," she stammered, and then with a sudden ripple of fluent words went on: "We did not expect any one to-night; we were just going out; won't you come in? This is my—— How dull Florence is now, is it not?—no one is here yet, it seems. The season grows later every year. Will you take this chair? Oh, I forgot! I must present you to my dearest friend, Miss Rombinino. Giulietta, this is Mr. Berwyn Kennedy."

The girl stood up white and rigid as death. It did not seem strange to meet him there and then; nothing was strange. All night and all day she had dreamed of this man. Now he had come.

But one thought went ringing through her brain.

"I thought he was dark—black, like a lie!"

CHAPTER IV.

GIULIETTA MEETS BERWYN KENNEDY.

BERWYN KENNEDY was taller than most men, and he carried himself well. He was loosely-jointed and too thin, but one only noticed this at a second glance. And at a second glance one would correct the first opinion, and admit that he was not handsome. His face was too hard; his features too marked. His cheek-bones were high and prominent; his chin was square and dogged. But it was a manly face, and one not easily forgotten. Hogarth would have made no thumb-nail sketch of that face; he would have carried it in his memory. His hair was brown-red—a Rembrandt hue—and he wore neither beard nor moustache.

Probably there was never a stranger meeting in the every-day course of drawing-room life than that of these four. For one man held a thunderbolt beneath which two people cowered, and the other was a girl, and she had in the hollow of her hand the doom of the other three.

But Mrs. Heathcote had set the keynote of the conversation. Her commonplace chatter babbled on—it was like finches chirping over a loaded cannon. There are tragedies now and again among well-bred people; there are never melodramas. Passions flash into bloody deeds at times, but they do not thunder in smoky words.

And so it was that Giulietta acknowledged the introduction, and Berwyn Kennedy murmured the usual inanities, and then turned to Mrs. Heathcote and repeated that the season was very late and that Florence was very dull.

“But then there is no place like Florence,” she said readily; “and there was a great deal of driving in the Cascine this afternoon. I saw Lady Smith and that niece of hers that every one thinks so pretty. I am sure I don’t; her complexion is frightful. And the Comtesse de Belleville;

and—oh ! do you know, I saw Ouida ! She was powdered and rouged, and wore a huge purple hat with plumes—it looked like a Belgian cabbage. But then, of course, it doesn't make any difference what a clever woman like Ouida wears. We poor folk who can't write books must worship our *modistes*."

Wrapped in his own thoughts, Berwyn Kennedy hardly heard what was said. He had not noticed Giulietta's sudden emotion when his name was spoken. But now he looked at her. He had almost forgotten the slight part he played in Gaetano's trial; the names did not strike him as identical. But there was something in her face that startled him from his brooding apathy. He forgot himself, his purpose, his wrongs, as he looked at her—this young girl, half Madonna, half Judith. He made some remark to her, but she answered with a few words—her English was of the convent sort; he must pardon her; she did not understand.

"But then," Mrs. Heathcote said, "we will talk French. French is every one's language. What was it Charles V. said about French being the language for conversation? But I'm sure we shouldn't quote him, for he said that English was the tongue for horses, or geese, or pigs, or something like that. I don't mind that though. When people say mean things about me I know that they envy me, and I thoroughly enjoy being envied."

Mrs. Heathcote, with her anxious eyes glancing from one to another, rattled on in French, talking of this and that, and meaning nothing.

Giulietta only spoke when it was absolutely necessary, and then in as few words as possible. She watched Berwyn Kennedy. He fascinated her. She could not take her eyes from him. She tried in vain to break the spell—as the Lady of Shalott struggled to break the web of her doom. A marvellous fascination held her.

"It is because he is my victim," she kept saying to herself; "it is because I must kill him !"

She caught herself studying his face, and turned her eyes away; but that was worse, for she saw it everywhere. She wondered God had given him such a sad, kind face; it did not seem right that God should give such a face to a

man who had lied and murdered. And then she thought of Gaetano, and all the past night rushed back upon her, and her purpose grew strong within her.

"I must kill him," she whispered to herself; "and this is hate I feel. He is my victim, and he draws me to him."

Berwyn Kennedy had known what boys boast of as love in his early days; that had gone down into darkness. For ten years he had nursed a slow wrath that waited only for the ripe hour. And now that slipped from him; he knew it was gone for ever. A man—a man with Scotch iron in his blood especially—does not easily relinquish a purpose that has made part and portion of life for half a decade. But in those few minutes in the *pension* drawing-room Berwyn Kennedy had seen the inevitable. He buried the old wretched past, and faced a new future.

The "dead masters, saw of might" that "they never loved who loved not at first sight," is time-old and ever new. And life goes on emphasizing this truth day by day. As time rubs out the old italic marks life writes them in afresh.

Berwyn Kennedy knew that he had met the one woman in the world for him. At any price and at any cost he would win her. There might be obstacles, but there are none that a resolute man cannot overcome. Obstacles? If there be mountains to scale, the lover—especially if he be a Scotchman—does not sit down and make laborious calculations of their height. He climbs.

And Berwyn Kennedy loved. This he knew. It was a palpable, present fact. When a man loves, as men love once in a lifetime, and only once, there can be neither doubt nor hesitation. Hundreds of years ago—for the world is old—a child went singing along a white Italian road; she had purple figs in her hands. A youth saw her, and loved her with a love that was born of a moment and can never die. And he was Petrarch, and she was Laura.

Berwyn Kennedy had passed the age when a man quibbles and deceives himself. He saw all the difficulties in the way—one that a weaker man would have thought insurmountable. To him there seemed nothing impossible, for he loved.

Mrs. Heathcote was talking. One hardly remembers what she said, but it was something about the races at the Zecca Vecchia, and how a little black jockey—an Algerian with a very odd name, but she had forgotten it—was thrown at the quarter, and she lost her money—forty *lire*—and it would have bought that love of a bonnet at Trinci's. But boys are so careless. She appealed to Captain Heathcote if it were not all true, and the Captain, who was sitting bolt upright on a chair, looking at nothing very steadily, admitted that it was quite true.

"And was Mlle. Rombinino at the race?" Berwyn Kennedy asked.

"I was at the convent—at Santa Annunziata," she replied. "I only came out into the world yesterday."

"*P' done!* it is like being born," Mrs. Heathcote said. Her embarrassment had left her; she was quite at ease, and she watched the visitor and her young friend with shrewd but veiled interest.

"And do you find the world what you fancied it?" Berwyn Kennedy asked.

"No," she said; "I did not know it was a tomb."

She had not meant to use these words. They passed her lips unwittingly. But it does not matter, she thought; the end will be very soon.

Mrs. Heathcote answered her.

"There!" she cried; "my sin has found me out! You poor, ill-used, forsaken darling! I knew you were glum, and wretched, and lonely. I meant to be with you all day. Don't you know, we were to drive in the park, but something happened?—I don't remember what—and I went alone. And you have been alone in this horrid *pension* all day, with nothing to do but to look out of the window and see those idiotic men fishing in the river for minnows, and I'm sure their nets are big enough to catch whales. I am sure I don't wonder you hate everything. Oh, what a selfish creature I am! But, my darling girl, don't talk about tombs—they are hideous. I remember once going down into the catacombs, and——"

Berwyn Kennedy interrupted her without ceremony. There was no one in the room for him but the young girl.

"It is a great change for you," he said feelingly. "I

can appreciate your loneliness. You have left all your old friends, and everything seems new, and strange, and unkind. But this will all seem different soon. The world is not all bad and sad. There is kindness, and faith, and love in it."

"You all seem to be in an heroic vein this evening," Mrs. Heathcote said laughingly, "but I am not—I am hungry. I know that is a shameful confession, *mais que voulez-vous?*—when one has not dined."

"You must pardon me," Berwyn Kennedy said, rising; "I——"

"You know we shall be glad to see you at any time," she added. "Must you go? I am sorry, but I should be a great deal more sorry if I did not hope you would come again."

He made the trite, necessary reply, and went away. But he did not go to his lodging. He walked about the streets for a time, and then struck off on a road that led him far up into the hills to meet the dawn that comes over Fiesole. He was not unhappy, for hate and despair had died, and love and hope were born.

Giulietta excused herself at once; she was tired; she was ill; they were very kind, but she must go to her room.

Then Mrs. Heathcote took her husband by the arm.

"Come!" she said merrily, exultingly, "to supper! to supper!"

"Edna! Edna! do you not know that we are lost? that——"

"Lost!" she echoed, with a ringing laugh; "you foolish boy, we are saved! Oh, how blind men are! Don't you know—can't you see that he is in love with her?"

Even then he looked at her stupidly, her words had no meaning for him.

She threw her arms about his neck and drew his face down.

"In love—love—love, my darling!—*épris, éperdument épris*—as you were with me!"

CHAPTER V.

AT FIESOLE.

BERWYN KENNEDY'S stroll led him far afield. From the Porta S. Gallo a white and dusty road winds up the hills, between garden walls, to S. Dominico di Fiesole. Day was breaking as he reached the old church, where the good Fra Angelico once dwelt. He looked down, and blue Florence lay beneath him. The young morning light touched with rose hue the old Duomo, and flamed on Giotto's perfect tower. The Arno, dull and thick, crept lazily under the bridges, and dripped over the dams. All about him, on the Tuscan hills, the vines murmured and the grey olive-trees rustled. The fig-trees—dwarf-like and gnarled—were heavy with fruit, that burst the purple skins from over-ripeness. The birds in the pear-trees and on the hedges sang to him—as love sang in his heart.

Kennedy threw himself on the dusty, burnt grass by the roadside. He filled his pipe and lit it, and set himself to thinking. He had much to think about.

In the first place, Giulietta; it was hard to push that thought aside even for a moment. Her face, sad and proud, with troubled eyes, was before him. He had seen that face long ago, he remembered now. Andrea del Sarto painted it, and the world has worshipped it for ages. But he was a resolute man, and set himself to the task before him. Few men who have passed the thirtieth mile-stone of life can look back and not see shadows and sins. Kennedy was no exception. He had not led an evil life. On the contrary, he had been clean, and moral, and just. But at one point—back near the twentieth milestone—a shadow lay. It was not a sin, but a misfortune,—a wrong suffered, and not a wrong done,—but it built a barrier between him and his present happiness. An honourable man, he told himself, and he had always been honourable, could

only tear this new-born love out of his heart. Then a specious "or" suggested itself—or break down the barrier. Hours went by as he juggled with the dilemma, and the end of all pondering and reasoning was—nothing. He filled his pipe again, and walked on, rapidly and impatiently. The little town of Fiesole was just astir. A sleepy waiter, in shirt-sleeves and apron, was dusting the little iron tables in front of Feruccio's. Kennedy ordered coffee and rolls; he was hungry—he had forgotten that—and cold, for the Tuscan nights are raw. The coffee put a new and better life into him. In this work-day world it is hard to be just and fear not. Before breakfast it is impossible.

Then he made a decision—the only right one, the only true one.

"I will go away," he said to himself. "I have been bitter and mad; I have wasted my youth in nursing hatred and unforgiveness."

He recalled all the high hopes he had, the bright ambitions of an honest youth; and now they were dust and ashes. These two people had wronged him. No, he could not forgive them, but he could go away and leave them to what happiness they could find in the Dead Sea fruit of sin. That was better. He would go back to the little place—the one spot in the world that bore the magic name of home—under the shadow of Stirling's old hill, and be as his father had been, a lonely man, but true to every duty.

This was a resolution. There are men who resolve and the "thing is done," and of these was Berwyn Kennedy. The mental struggle over and done with, he felt the need of physical exertion that comes to every strong man, and set out, walking rapidly, through the town.

The world was awake. The house-doors were open. Ragged, yellow youngsters tumbled and laughed on the pavements. Young girls and old women, plaiting straw in the doorways, stared at him as he went past.

"'Fede mia!" laughed a big-eyed girl; "he is mad, that he rushes this way!"

"He is English," said an old dame authoritatively; "all English are mad. It is the sun, *bena mia*, for in their own land there is only a moon, and they never see even that, for it snows every night."

"But he is a fine man," said the girl; "*cor' Dio!* and his legs are very long."

All unconscious of this graceful compliment, Kennedy tramped on across the wide *piazza*,—Mr. Henry James calls it "whimsically spacious,"—past the bare-looking cathedral, that can, however, boast of possessing Giotto's beggar, and found himself, at last, in the fine road that curves down through the Mugnone valley to Florence. Underfoot the white, dry road; on either side the grim, grey garden-walls; it is a path that meditation might have shaped for herself.

"And Giulietta," Kennedy kept saying to himself; "and Giulietta."

He looked at the facts resolutely and firmly, and though he had determined to go away and make his life empty of the love that might, it may be, have been his, it all seemed sad—very sad. He loved her so well, and he had never loved before. Then he remembered an old verse—palpitant with the fine heroism of the better, "spacious" days—

"I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more."

There was comfort in that; it brought his manhood up to the mark.

One may be heroic—and Berwyn Kennedy had set himself an heroic task—but, after all, the little things are the important things. Dr. Johnson wrote the "*Rambler*," but one has it on his own authority that he "minded his belly very studiously." When St. George set out to bag a dragon he saw first to the grinding of his sword.

Having decided to leave Florence, Kennedy turned to considering ways and means. Of course, he must end his connection with the bank. That gave him no concern. It had been merely an incident in his Florentine life; and, besides, he had three hundred pounds a year. One can live on that—in Scotland. He could wind up his business affairs in a few days. Good. This was Monday; he would take the 8.30 train Saturday evening.

"I will see Heathcote," he remarked half-aloud, "and tell him; I fancy he will sleep easier."

He went to his rooms, took a cold plunge, and then—it was ten o'clock—went to the bank. He sent a telegram to

the head-office in London, resigning his position. Then he wrote an explanatory letter. The explanation, of course, left personal affairs out of the count entirely. The day was a busy one. There were scores of things to do: accounts to settle; odds and ends to set in order.

Kennedy went back to his rooms in the Via Tornabuoni; then he went to dinner. He dined slowly and well, as one should do when one has fought the world, the flesh, and the devil, and "knocked them out" in the third round. He had dinner at the Hotel della Pace; and that, as every one knows, is in the Piazza Manin, off the Lungarno Nuovo—every one, at all events, who does not devote himself to Mr. Ruskin's "Mornings in Florence," but takes notes now and again for a book of his own, called "Evenings in Florence." That book for choice! It may lack the æsthetic charm of mildewed art, but it will sparkle and laugh with the merry life that runs riot in the streets of this bright city.

The Pension Bellini, where Captain and Mrs. Heathcote had their apartments, was but a few steps away—westward, along the river bank. The porter, in all the glory of a blue frock-coat and brass buttons, was posing in the courtyard among the green shrubs and the white statues.

"Captain Heathcote," said Kennedy.

"Il Capitano Hetácota?" repeated the flunky; "certo, Signore."

He led the way to the drawing-room. He waited while the porter took his card upstairs. In a few moments Tito Ciuti came in: wizened as ever, more apologetic than usual.

"The Captain Heathcote and his lady," he said in formal English, "are in the opera of the *Cavalleria Rusticara* of the Maestro Mascagni, and do not return as yet."

Kennedy was annoyed. He wished to see them; to tell them of his departure; to make an end of the whole bad business. He was not an impulsive man, but, having come to a decision, he wished to carry it into action forthwith.

Tito Ciuti bowed again, apologetic, self-effacing.

"The Miss Rombinino is at home," he remarked, with much the air of one excusing himself to a friend for having accidentally run away with said friend's wife.

Kennedy had been conscious of no intention of seeing

Giulietta; but now, in the flash of a moment, it seemed to him that he had come to the Pension Bellini for no other purpose.

"Take her this card," he said, handing the old servant his card and a five-franc piece. There is no especial Gaelic tendency toward "tips"—large "tips" above all. But this old man, Kennedy felt, deserved one. He had shouldered a responsibility that the lover had not dared even to weigh. And Mr. Berwyn Kennedy gave up that round and beautiful bit of silver as freely and gladly as you or I, or the man next door, would give a sixpence to any one who pulled us out of the Serpentine as we were sinking for the last time.

"Take her this card."

"Yes, mister; I thank you, sir," Tito replied, in his precise, bad English.

In a few moments Giulietta entered the room. She was very pale, and her eyes burned with a strange, sleepless light. Her throat and breast were covered with a mist of lace, and her black gown, austere in its plainness, fell straight from her hips. For a moment she stood in the doorway, holding the *portières* apart with either hand, and behind her gloomed the dull, red light that fell from the hall-lamps. She might have been Judith, as she drew back the curtains of Holoferne's tent; she might have been Medea, when—— But she came forward with her little, prim, quiet, convent ways, and said she was glad he had come—yes, she was very glad he had come, for she had been thinking of him.

The love he had been trying to bury rose up in the man's heart, and made him weak as a child. If he could hide his face in the folds of her frock and whisper his love; if he could lie there at her feet, kissing her feet, and telling his love; then he knew that he should be happy. If he could kiss her eyes and her forehead—just there where the hair grew down over the temples—and then die in the lightning of those stormy eyes—ay, that were well.

Then he pulled himself together. The old verse went singing through his brain,—

"I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more!"

The lover died, and the man was born anew.

"I am going away," he said.

He had not meant to say this; it was abrupt, foolish. What was it to her whether he went or stayed, lived or died? He tried to mend matters.

"I came to bid good-bye to Captain Heathcote," he added, "and I wished to bid you good-bye."

"Going!" she cried.

"Yes, I am going," he replied; but, filled with his own trouble, he did not notice her excitement. Then she controlled herself. She sat down in a chair that faced him and spoke calmly, easily, slowly.

"He is going away," she thought, "because he has killed my brother; and he fears me, and he is going away."

These words kept echoing in her ears, in her heart, in her soul—over and over again.

"When are you going?" she asked. "I am grieved that you are to leave Florence."

Sorrow had made him self-centered: he thought only of himself; he saw nothing strange or unusual in the girl's sudden question.

"Saturday," he made answer. "I am going very far away, to my home in Scotland, in Stirling. I shall never come again to Italy."

"Yes," she replied, "you are going very far away."

He did not hear these words, it may be; in any case he made no answer. The spell of her beauty had fallen on him like a madness. Strong man as he was, he could not trust his strength when he was near her, for her presence was like an opiate, stealing away resolution, and honour, and self.

"Good-bye," he said abruptly.

He held out his hand, but she did not take it. She drew back and made one of the quaint little curtseys they had taught her in the convent.

"*A rivederci*," she said.

He went out. Giulietta stood alone in the dusk drawing-room.

"He fascinates me," she murmured, all low; "it is because he is my victim."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MODEL GUARDIAN.

GIULIETTA went to her room. She blew out the candles, for she wished to be alone, and the flickering shadows that danced on the walls seemed animate. Out of doors there was a light rain, mixed with a murmuring wind; it sounded like swarming bees. The lights along the curving Arno were dull and wavering. Far to the south-west a storm brooded among the blue-black hills, and the shadow of its darkness was over the city.

A little lad, ragged, and hungry, and merry, sat dangling his legs over the stone parapet of the Ponte alla Carraja, singing in the rain. He might have been the genius of this new Italy. A peasant from Bello Sguardo went by driving his asses and whistling to the jangling of their bells. He had done a good day's work: the figs were all sold, and the fowls had been snapped up in an hour; and he had a fine red petticoat for Gianina—*cielo!* how her eyes would sparkle!—and a picture, all blue and yellow, of good St. Anthony reasoning with a pig, for little 'Gino. He whistled a blither snatch, shouted to the asses, and went on his way.

Giulietta saw these pictures as one sees a face in the half-sleep of early morning. But many days afterwards they came back with whimsical distinctness—the boy, the brown peasant, the patient brutes with drooping ears and jangling bells.

"He is going away," she said to herself, "and—it must be done now. That is better. There is no room for hesitation. I must do it at once. I shall think of Gaetano, and then I shall be able to kill him."

She thought of all the women who had killed men; there were very many, she remembered. She wondered

how they had done it. But these women had all been base women—had been she knew not what. In the convent, one had told her that they were all in hell. She thought she saw them—great women, with faces wild with passion, with crowns on their hair, and red robes that clung to them. And hell she saw was a windy, dark place, filled with clouds and flame.

This fancy was natural enough in one whose ideas of this world and the next were gathered from the frescoes on the walls of the little chapel in the convent. She was terrified. Then she knew that she dared not do this thing. She would go away; she would die—but she could not go down among those women in the cloud and flame.

She heard the lad singing in the rainy street, and the words of the song floated up to her,—

“La camelia,
Bello fiore,
Bello senz’ odore,”—

and then something about a woman, who was beautiful, but without heart,—

“Bella senz’ cuore.”

Nothing but the fragment of a vacuous street-song; but it banished the vision, and brought real life close to her.

“I will end it all,” she said; “I will go and tell my guardian. I have been mad. How could I do such a thing? My hands are so small and weak.”

She threw a heavy wrap over her and went out. She saw no one: the servants were all in the kitchen; even the porter had forsaken his post. The rain beat in her face, and the wind snatched at her garments. She beckoned to the lad, and asked him to call her a carriage. He came back, perched up by the driver, singing louder than ever,—

“Bella senz’ cuore.”

He took the *lira* she gave him, and fled down the street, with the notion that perhaps she might regret parting with that fortune.

Giulietta gave Montecinqe’s address; the driver cracked his long whip, and the jaded horse started off, galvanized into a momentary trot.

Montecinqne lived in the Via di Lando, in that transpontine part of Florence where the hillside has broken out in a rash of studios. The shady avenues and streets are haunted with long-haired men in velvet jackets, who are on intimate terms of acquaintance with all the gods and goddesses of antiquity. It is a little world where the old-time Pygmalion miracle is daily done, and marble changes to woman. These Galateas made by Mr. Powers and Mr. Ball have one advantage over the historical one—they neither eat nor talk. Byron objected to seeing a woman eat; and he was quite right. And there is a universal predilection for the woman who does not talk.

Fashion and art do not always rub shoulders, but in this case they are good neighbours. There are villas there where stately English dowagers hold sway, *palazze* where very dignified Tuscans drink ancestral wine.

Montecinqne's house made few pretensions; the Hampstead house-agent would describe it as "eligible." It stood back from the road among the trees. A prim path led to the door. On each side stood a vase of well-kept flowers; among the trees lurked a thoroughly immodest Venus—old enough to know better too.

There were lights in the lower windows. When Giulietta let the huge bronze knocker fall, the door opened almost on the instant. It was as though she had been expected.

For a moment the light blinded her. Then she recognised the man in the doorway; she knew those sunken eyes, that pallid skin. This was the man she had met the night when she took the oath that she had come to unsay. She shuddered, even as she had shuddered then.

"Signorina," he said, "you are expected. The master will receive you in his room."

That she was expected did not seem strange; in fact she thought only of the purpose with which she had come. The man shambled on ahead of her, his knees wide apart, as though the chains were dragging at them. He showed her into a room that faced the garden. Montecinqne was lolling in a low, velvet chair, smoking cigarettes. He rose and kissed her cheek.

"My dear child," he said, "how could you brave this wretched night, and alone? You are welcome, dear

Giulietta. Give me your cloak; ah! that is well. Sit here by the fire."

A little stove, with a brass ball atop, glowered away in the corner. She walked towards it, and then turned and faced her guardian.

"I do not mind the weather," she said; "I had not thought of it. I have been thinking of that night and of all that I said. I remember it all. But now I know that I shall never keep that promise."

All this she repeated as one might a lesson that had been well conned; the excitement in her had all died away.

"Won't you sit down, dear?" Montecinqe said. "No? But you will pardon me; it is such a waste of energy to stand. Thank you."

He stretched himself easily in the chair and threw away his half-burned cigarette; as he rolled another he looked at her and chatted on: "You have changed your mind, Giulietta, and that, of course, is a woman's privilege; but in this case I fear it is impossible. Fate has assigned you the task, and I, even I, cannot help you to shirk it."

"I cannot do it," she said resolutely and slowly.

"The means shall be found. You shall have assistance," Montecinqe said.

She answered as before: she could not do it.

"Listen!" he cried, standing up; "you do not understand. Now you have no choice—that time is past. You are in a web that cannot be broken. About you and about me is a power that is implacable as fate, and resistless as death. You cannot escape it."

"I can die," she said simply.

Montecinqe laughed bitterly. Then he grasped her arm and spoke low.

"Do you remember the oath?" he asked; "shall I repeat it?"

He watched the terror growing in her eyes and blanching her face. There is nothing—not even love—that is stronger than superstition. It is on this that the shrewd heads who control the *Mafia* have built, and they have built well. These galley-dogs that they let slip here and there are all fast in the leash of superstition. Men and women are bound by it. There is only one way of killing the

Mafia. Hanging will not do it; the guillotine will not do it. King Bomba hanged, and shot, and flogged, and brigandage flourished. But when King Bomba's evil days passed, an Education Bill ended the whole bad business—or is ending it. And the one way of blotting out the *Mafia* is to blot out superstition. That will not be yet; it is a far cry to the millennium.

"Shall I repeat that oath?" Montecinque said.

"My God! no!" moaned the girl, covering her face with her hands; "do not speak it!"

He led her to a seat. Again his mood changed; he talked sadly, but with the earnestness of one whose heart is afire.

"No, we need not speak it. What need have we for oaths, Giulietta? Your brother, my son—I loved him; he was almost my son—cries to us from the grave. You do not know what he suffered; I shall not tell you. The chains, the blows——"

"Merciful God! I cannot bear it!"

"Until his heart broke, and he died. And the man who killed him—our brother, our son—lives, and we talk of oaths! Your brother cried out in his cell for vengeance on this man, who lied and murdered him. You are the last of his blood——"

"Have mercy!" she cried; "let me go! no more! I am growing mad!"

He did not detain her; he did not offer to accompany her. He smoked placidly, watching the clouds fade, with a smile half of amusement and half of triumph. He was vain, as most clever men are, and there was pleasure in the thought that he had played his part—and won. He felt sure of that. He nursed these satisfactory reflections for an hour or so. Then he rang and ordered his servant to fetch a bottle of wine.

"There is a man here," said the servant; "he has just come, signore, and he has a message."

"Send him in."

Tito Ciuti entered hesitatingly, holding his dripping hat in his hand.

"If the signore pleases," he explained, "I have a letter. It is from the Signorina Rombinino. She asked me to deliver it. Here it is."

Montecinqne took it indolently.

"You are faithful," he said.

"To those I love," the old man answered.

"You may go."

Montecinqne read the letter, smiled to himself, and re-read it. The words were few ; it ran thus :—

"You must be right. I will keep my oath : I will kill Berwyn Kennedy to-night. Pray God that I may die.

"GIULIETTA."

CHAPTER VII.

A MAN FOUND DEAD.

"But I knocked twice."

"Ah! you knocked twice, and I tell you to knock three times, and four times, and five times. Body of death! you will drive me mad. Was ever man cursed with such a woman? Take in the coffee."

"Through the key-hole," grumbled the old woman, but she shuffled out with the tray. She knocked three times, four times, five times, but there was no answer.

She stooped and peered through the key-hole, but she could see nothing.

The long passage that ran past the door ended in a *loggia*-garden, and on this the windows of the room opened. The daylight that flared in through the half-drawn curtains disclosed a large, well-ordered room. There were heavy rugs on the tiled floor; a few pictures on the walls—water-colours of Scotch heaths, purple and windy; a large book-case, tables, and chairs. In the alcove that filled the far corner was a bed, with curtains of white muslin draped about it.

The windows, opening on the balcony of the *loggia*, were ajar; the old woman pushed them aside and entered the room.

"Signore," she said, "pardon, but it is late and your coffee is served. Signore, I could not make you hear. Signore, pardon; it is late."

There was no response; she laid the tray on the table, and drew the bed-curtains aside; then she fled shrieking.

For the man who lay in the bed there was no more early or late; he had done with time, done with the hot and cold fits of life—dead.

There was a red gash in the breast where a knife had

gone straight to the heart. He lay on his side, with his eyes closed, as one who had died in sleep. The skin of the face was blue and dull, and the square jaw drooped. There was little blood—one red, thin stream, that had stained the linen, and gathered in a rusty pool in a hollow by the pillow.

Men make good resolutions and—die.

Berwyn Kennedy had thrust aside all the tempting devils that leered at him, and then fate snapped the thread. The shadows, and sins, and secrets of his life were nothing now; death had closed the book.

The old woman fled shrieking into the kitchen, where the *padrone* was making coffee. She told her story without many words. "Dead!" she cried, "murdered! Body of God! he is red with blood!"

Her husband caught her by the shoulder and shook her, bidding her keep quiet. "The *Inglese*?" he asked. He was phlegmatic for an Italian. He only shrugged his shoulders and choked the old woman into silence. Then he locked her in the kitchen, and went and summoned the police. He found two *carabinieri* in the Via Tornabuoni. One of these was a young man, a soldierly-looking fellow. The other was short and fat, and was, perhaps, fifty years old. He had a round, plump face and sleepy eyes. They followed the *padrone* up the stone staircase, for the room where the dead man lay was on the third floor. The old man was taciturn.

"I know nothing," he said; "my wife took in the coffee, and she came out and screamed that he was dead. I know nothing. I summon you; see for yourselves."

They tried the door; it was locked.

"How did your wife get in?" the *carabiniere* with the sleepy eyes asked lazily.

"I will bring her. Ask her; I know nothing," said the *padrone*. He unlocked the kitchen door and brought her to them.

"It was this way—Mother of God! he is as pale as death!—I knocked at the door," she said, "this way; again—this way—no answer."

"Yes," the officer said, "yes."

"My husband said knock, and knock, and knock. And

I knock—this way—three times, four times, five times—this way. He does not answer. Then I go to the window——”

“Lead the way.”

She took them down the passage, to the little square *loggia*. It was eight feet square, and the only entrance or exit was by the passage-door. No other windows, except those of Kennedy’s room, opened into it.

“Here,” she went on, “I call to him, but he does not speak. I go in and call to him; I lay the coffee on the table—see, there is the tray!—and I call again, and then——”

The *carabiniere* pushed her aside and entered the room alone, bidding his young companion wait at the window. He looked at the body for a moment; examined the wound; then he drew the curtains together. The dead man’s clothes lay on a chair by the bed; his half-smoked pipe was on the table at the head; the reading-table was littered with books and papers; on the writing-desk lay a purse, a pocket-book, and a watch. Nothing had been disturbed; the room was in the order one would expect.

There was no weapon capable of inflicting the wound; there was no trace of blood save on the bed-linen and the dead man’s night-shirt.

The officer went out and closed the windows.

“Stay here,” he said to his fellow, “and admit no one; I will talk with these people.”

“What do you want to ask?” the *padrone* inquired; “my house is ruined, but that is nothing—nothing at all, of course; I can starve and answer questions.”

“You have not a pleasant temper,” said the policeman, blinking at him; “but I have met with worse. Who is this man?”

The *padrone* answered readily enough; he gave the name, the business; he knew nothing more. The man had lodged with him for two months; he was very quiet; he spent every evening in his room.”

“Always, every evening,” the old woman broke in, “he read and smoked in his room. But the night before last he did not come home all night; he was not here in the morning. I noticed it—I know.”

"When did he come in?"

"It was nine o'clock when he came in?"

With these facts in his possession, the officer went to report the case. He had no clue, no hint, but the mystery interested him all the more for that reason. Here was an Englishman, a banker as it seemed, and doubtless a man of some importance, who had been killed. Suppose Giosue Trinci should unravel the mystery? It would be the making of Giosue Trinci, he concluded. He walked slowly, weighing the few facts he had gleaned.

His chief was a younger man than himself, who had stepped into the position over the heads of men who had, at all events, the claim of long service. He was one of those lucky folk who have that mysterious thing called influence. The chief listened to the report.

"Very well, Trinci," he said; "I will send a man to investigate the affair. Return to your duty."

The old policeman's dream-palace tumbled down about his ears in ruins, but he said not a word. He made his salute and went out.

The news of the murder spread. One hardly knows how such things get about—they fly like bacilli.

Montecinqe heard the rumour as he strolled toward the restaurant where he breakfasted. He went at once to the office of the chief of police of the quarter in which Berwyn Kennedy had lived. There was no need of an introduction. He questioned and the man answered.

"He is dead, then?"

"Yes, signore."

"And there is no clue?"

"None."

Montecinqe twisted his grey moustache, and his hand as it turned displayed a ring—a gold woven chain.

"You think it improbable then that the guilty one will be discovered?"

The policeman had glanced involuntarily at the ring; he turned his eyes away at once.

"Improbable, signore? It is impossible."

Montecinqe breakfasted; he was in an excellently good humour. Then he called a carriage and drove to the Pension Bellini.

"I must save Giulietta from judge and jury," he thought; "for, *fe'didio!* I prefer to be judge and jury myself." He was satisfied. His plan had worked itself out admirably; every trump had told, and the game was his own.

"Signorina Rombinino?" he said to the servant.

"But, Excellency, the signorina is not at home. She went out last evening, it seems, and she has not returned."

Montecinqe was a ready man: he showed no surprise.

"To be sure," he added; "Signorina Rombinino is at my house, as I was about to say. She is going on a journey, and I have come for her luggage. I shall have no trouble in getting her things together; she has given me full instructions."

"Yes, Excellency."

"Show me to her room."

As he mounted the wide staircase he was busy wondering what could have happened to her. He came to the conclusion that her sudden flight had been planned. "She is plucky," he mused; "but not clever. She should have come at once to me, but what would you? Doubtless she is wandering about somewhere, after the fashion of hysterical femininity."

Her room was not in disorder; nothing had been disarranged.

"She is not far away," Montecinqe decided; "no. After it was all over her courage failed her, and she fled. She will come back beyond doubt. In the meantime there must be no speculation about her absence—here in the house. It must be supposed that she is with me; and I must find her. If any one should connect her flight with this fellow's death, *sul mi 'onore*——"

He did not finish the sentence; he shrugged his shoulders. The shrug was quite as eloquent as words could have been.

But Montecinqe was not alarmed. As a matter of fact he had nothing to fear. Everything had played into his hands as he had planned it should do. There had been no hitch in this drama in which he had played such a well-studied part. But the girl should not have vanished in this ridiculous fashion; he had not counted on that.

"I should not have been surprised if she had turned out

a coward," he said, tumbling over her things; "but a fool! and, *cielo!* such a fool!"

Suddenly it occurred to him to look for her jewels; she had a number of trinkets and gems that had belonged to the family for years. A string of pearls, for instance—sards and *intaglios*—that age had made valuable, and a set of opals set in thick Etruscan gold. Montecinque was an old friend of these jewels. They had been in his care for many years, and he knew their worth.

"*Ebbene!*" he muttered; "they are gone!"

He did not like the turn affairs were taking. If Giulietta had taken her jewels, it was because she had not money enough for her flight; then she must have gone a great distance, for she had six or seven hundred francs—he was sure of that. The thought annoyed him, but he brushed it aside as one does a wasp, and set to work packing up her things. He tumbled them all into trunks and portmanteaus, and then rang for a servant.

"Send these to my house," he said.

"Yes, *signore*."

He met no one on his way downstairs.

"It is just as well," he said to himself; "the Signora Heathcote, for instance, she has the curiosity of an ostrich. I am not in the mood for answering indiscreet questions."

CHAPTER VIII.

FEAR AND FLIGHT.

THE fast train that left Florence in the early morning had reached Chiasso. It was mid-day, and the sunlight flooded the little valley where the town nestled. There was snow on the mountains far above, but the long slopes were green and the village was alive with summer gaiety. The station where the train drew up was crowded, for this Chiasso is a place of great importance. It is the meeting-place of north and south, where one greets Italy or bids it farewell.

Giulietta descended from one of the carriages and looked about her. In the midst of this bustling crowd and babel of all tongues she seemed like one from another world. Involuntarily one thought of the old strong verses—

“She, dolefull lady, like a dreary spright,
Cald by strong charmes out of eternall night,
Had Death’s own ymage figured in her face,
Full of sad signes, fearfull to living wight.”

She wore a close-fitting black gown of dull cloth, and furs were wrapped about her throat, emphasizing the pallor of her face. In one hand she carried a small brown bag, such an one as women carried a few years ago. People jostled her, but she paid no heed. A lad came by with a tray, on which were flasks of wines and spirits and a plate of biscuits. When he offered his wares she remembered that she had eaten nothing for many hours. Hours? It seemed as though a black and billowy life time were behind her: yesterday seemed generations away. She bought a glass of wine and a biscuit. Then the guards rushed up and down; there were cries of “*Einsteigen!*” and “*Partenza!*” She was in her seat again and the train was moving away. It curved along the mountain-side, and dashed with a roaring noise through tunnels; but she

sat looking through the window with fixed eyes, seeing nothing. Here was a little town on the hillside, the red roofs gleaming in the sunlight, and over them, like a dove, brooded the white church. There a group of patient cattle stood, knee-deep in the grass; farther on a peasant went whistling up a stony path. These she saw not. Far above the green forests rose the mountains, torn into chasms and terrible with gleaming peaks—lonely and white. And that was the land, she thought, of lost souls; it was there they wandered alone with the sins that had damned them.

“Pardon! Mademoiselle is travelling alone?”

Giulietta started in fear; then she controlled herself and answered coldly, Yes, she was travelling alone; she preferred being alone.

The stranger did not reply for a moment. She was a little old woman, with a kind, sad face and soft eyes. Her white hair was arranged in regular little curls, falling nearly to the shoulders. On her lap slept a fluffy Maltese terrier, a ball of white and yellow fur.

“I did not wish to disturb you,” she added, in bad but fluent French and very softly. “Forgive me.”

Giulietta was touched.

“No! no!” she cried impulsively. “Forgive me; I am very rude; but I am thinking of——”

“You have lost a friend,” her fellow-traveller said gently, glancing at the black gown.

“My brother is dead,” Giulietta answered at last; “and I have lost all my friends.”

Looking at that kind old face, the girl’s reserve melted; she yielded to the yearning for sympathy that comes to every one, and impulsively she put out her hands.

“Forgive me,” she repeated. “I was very rude; but I have not slept, and I am very tired. It was kind of you to speak to me.”

“Do not say so; but you are so young, and look so sad, I could not do otherwise. I am an old woman, and I have seen much trouble in this world, and I have never seen too much sympathy. You will feel better if you talk, and do not think of your sorrows.”

“It is not easy to forget them,” Giulietta said, with a weary smile; “I have nothing but sorrows.”

"They will pass away, my child," the little old lady said cheerily; "the clouds pass, as the sunlight does. You have never been in these mountains before?"

"I have never been out of Florence before," the girl answered; "I was in the convent until—until a few days ago, and then I came into the world; and it was all bad and black, and every one I loved was dead."

"But you are going to your friends?"

"I have no friends. I loved my brother, but he is dead. And my father is dead. He was a very brave man. He fought for Italy," she went on, her eyes sparkling proudly, "and the grand king called him one of his lions; but he is dead, and now I love no one. For I cannot love myself. I am not like them; they were brave, and good, and true, and I am none of these things. No—oh, Mother of God!—no!"

She hid her face in her hands and shuddered. Her companion touched her arm.

"Tell me of your father," she said tenderly; "I am sure he was a brave man."

"My father," the girl said, looking up with the old, proud look, "he was very brave. He always kept his word, and kept his oath. He was General Rombinino."

"I have heard of your father, my child: my brother was consul in Venice. Yes, your father was a brave man. And now you are alone? Where are you going?"

"Away from Florence!" Giulietta exclaimed passionately, "away from Florence! It is filled with blackness, and horror, and crime! I want to forget it all!"

This meridional fervour did not surprise the old gentlewoman as it might have surprised one less cosmopolitan.

"Poor child!" she said; "you have suffered, I am sure. Do not tell of that. Put away the past, and let us talk of the future."

"I am going to London," the girl replied; "it is a great city—a world."

"Yes, child, it is a world of good and evil; it is like your own Florence. It is my home, dear, and I know it well. What will you do there? Can you speak English?"

"Only a little, madame; in the convent we read Shakespeare. But," she added, "I am not poor."

"That is good," her fellow-traveller answered, "for where you are going poverty is a crime."

"A crime," the girl stammered; then she laughed and went on, "I am very foolish—I do not know the world."

"Do you go by way of Paris?"

Giulietta opened her bag and took out the little yellow book of tickets, and fumbled over the pages.

"Let me see, dear," her new friend said, and glanced through the book. "No, *ma foi*! this is fortunate: you go by Brussels; and so do I. It is longer, but cheaper."

"I did not know," said Giulietta; "they gave me the tickets at the booking-office. Then we journey together, if you will let me, madame?"

"My dear child, I shall be delighted. You have told me your name; I am Mrs. Charteris. We are two lonely women, and in this world women must band together for protection, don't you know?"

They reached Basle in the evening; they saw nothing but the barren station and the lights flaring in the park without. They dined at the buffet, waiting for the Brussels train. They did not reach Brussels until the next day. In the meantime Giulietta stole a few hours of sleep. Then she was refreshed and stronger. She banished the bitter thoughts that had clung to her, and talked eagerly of the new world she was to see. And Mrs. Charteris in the girl's enthusiasm saw her own youth mirrored.

The two travellers had to go on to Antwerp to take the night boat for Harwich; so they had an early dinner in the cosy restaurant at the Gare du Nord. Before they hurried into their carriage Mrs. Charteris bought a bundle of papers. One of these was *Le Soir*. Giulietta glanced it over carelessly; then she threw it down: she could not read in that rumbling train. There was a long and tedious stop at Malines. Giulietta picked up the paper again, and suddenly, in the midst of all that maze of print, half a dozen lines stood out—clear, like flame.

"*Florence, Tuesday*: An Englishman, one named Kénéde, of a bank, was found this morning dead in his room. He had been stabbed to the heart. There is no clue to the murderer."

For a moment the paper rustled in her fingers; then

she let it fall. Her face blanched ; she clenched her hands and tried to still the beating of her heart,—she wondered whether her companion could hear it,—then she bowed her head. And to herself she whispered, “God is just; He doeth all things well.”

And the bells of St. Rombald, high in the old belfry, chimed the evensong, and it was as though they said, “Ay, God is just; He doeth all things well—in His own good time.”

CHAPTER IX.

NEWS BY THE WAY.

“God doeth all things well.”

The train rattled on again: past the gabled houses; past the city walls; past the snug farmhouses; past the red-brick kilns; past the low pools and trim hedges; out into the broad flat country. But these things Giulietta did not see. The words she had read blazed before her eyes. The bells of Malines kept sounding in her ears—soft and persistent.

“God doeth all things well,” they chimed; “in His own time, He doeth all things well.”

Then this thought came to her. He was dead; he had paid for his lie with his life. For a moment it almost seemed to her that it was her own hand that had dealt the blow. That night went past her like a scroll on which was written every deed and every emotion.

She lived it over again. Now she was leaving Montecinque's house; the wind was in her hair; the rain beat on her face; the town-gates were closed, but some one opened them for her. She thanked the man; she remembered the very words she used. Then she hurried on, down the Via Romana, toward the bridge. There a man stopped her and said she was beautiful, too beautiful to walk alone, and he laughed. She broke away from him and hurried on. She was under the spell of Montecinque's words. She had murder in her heart. She remembered reaching her room, writing to her guardian that she would do the deed—that she would keep her oath. Tito Ciuti carried her letter. Yes, she met him in the hall; she gave him money, and bade him make great haste. Then she thought the struggle was over; there was no room for hesitancy.

But something——

What was it ?

Now she remembered : a vision came upon her ; she saw the little convent-chapel, and the nuns were chanting, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death. Amen !" Over and over again they sang it. And a great terror fell upon her—fear of she knew not what.

As she sat there in the darkening carriage she saw herself standing again in the room as the sudden hope came to her ; yes, she would go to another land, and leave all this tangled web of sin, and crime, and blood behind her. She took her money and swept her jewels into the bag ; she fled through the wind-blown streets ; then the station with its lights and noise ; then the train rushing out into the darkness, through the darkness to the dawn of a new day.

She called back the night, every moment of it.

And now—the man was dead.

She could have cried aloud, "Who has killed him ? Who has killed him ?"

She tried to think it over quietly. There was no one save herself who had reason to seek this man's life. Girl as she was, she had read his character clearly enough to be sure that Montecinqe was not one to imperil himself for an idea. She had not thought of that before. Now, in the clearer light of the event, his intense desire for vengeance seemed strained and unnatural.

The *Mafia* ?

But it could not be that the *Mafia* was responsible. The society had set her the work ; surely it had not stepped in to forestall her.

Who killed him ?

Her brain was tangled in a thousand perplexed suppositions, and through them all grew a strong, clear purpose. She must know ; she must find out ; this was the penance laid upon her for her sin.

Now and again a woman's intuition goes straight to the goal, or near it, while all the time a man would go stumbling about through logical bushes and byways, and never "arrive," as the French say. And this fell true in the present instance. Giulietta shaped one sentence to herself : "Berwyn Kennedy was not killed for my sake." Where

this idea came from she knew not. But it grew stronger and more persistent. It was an unreasoning feminine fancy; and every one knows that a feminine fancy is the most adamantine thing in existence.

"You are troubled, dear?" Mrs. Charteris' hand was on her arm and the old, kind face was close to hers.

"Yes," said Giulietta, turning to her friend; "a death."

"I think I know," the old lady said gently; "I have read it in the paper here. It is shocking! And he did much for your brother, it seems."

"My brother!" the girl echoed.

Mrs. Charteris handed her the paper. It contained a longer and different account, and Giulietta read it slowly and aloud: "M. Kénéde, the Englishman who was killed yesterday in Florence, was well-known in the English colony there. He was one of the witnesses in the Rombinino trial. It will be remembered that this young man, a son of the famous General Rombinino, was convicted, on the evidence of his guardian, of robbery and attempted murder. M. Kénéde was called to identify the notes stolen, and afterwards was one of the committee that endeavoured to secure Rombinino's pardon. The young man's sudden death put an end to these efforts. M. Kénéde's death is as much a mystery as Rombinino's supposed crime. It is said, however, that the police have a clue, which they are diligently following."

Twice she read these words.

"I saw the name, my dear," she heard her friend saying, "and I knew it must be your brother."

"And he was innocent," the girl cried; "you do not know, but he was innocent. He never could do such a thing,—Gaetano,—and my guardian knows he is innocent. But——"

Again she read the newspaper paragraph.

"Do not speak of it any more," she added; "I must think; it is all strange to me."

Then they arrived at Antwerp. They drove to the quay; in an hour they were steaming down the broad river, and behind them the lights of the city curved like a bent bow. The river broadened into the sea; the salt winds swept across the grey, tumultuous waters, and overhead the calm

stars shone. The night was cold and raw. The passengers were crowded into the stuffy cabin of the steamer. Giulietta left her friend and went on deck. The keen, salt air was like a draught of wine; the tossing waves clamoured about the ship like impatient hounds. A feeling of physical elation came upon her, and the mental tension of the last few days slipped unconsciously away. She was dead to thought. Only she paced the deck to and fro, and it seemed as though she were fighting a battle with the wind and the sea. When the grey light broadened in the sky and the lines of the English coast rose above the tumbling waters, she was calm and self-centered. During the swiftly passing night she had neither thought nor planned, but, in some strange fashion, she had resolved. She knew just what she meant to do; she almost knew how she could do it.

Gaetano was dead.

And Berwyn Kennedy was not responsible for his suffering or the death that followed.

Who had killed these men?

To learn this—she had no other purpose!

CHAPTER X.

A NEW FRIEND.

ANY one may know London and love it well, but it requires a great deal of courage to face it from the outlook of the Liverpool Street Station. If it happens to be a foggy day, the fog hangs thickest there; if it drizzles elsewhere, it rains there; and if there is mud on Piccadilly pavements, in the neighbourhood of Liverpool Street it is a morass. The old Londoner shrugs his shoulders and sighs over this; the new-comer is in despair. Especially if Liverpool Street stands out in Indian ink, from a background of Florentine gold.

Giulietta felt that she had reversed Dante's famous saying: she was one who entered into hell. The iron spans of the dingy roof seemed to threaten and confine her. All about her was smoke and sulphur. The porters and guards, hurried and short-tempered, were the evil spirits of the place.

The continental express from Harwich comes in at the far side of the station; one must dive through dark corridors and wander through dingy luggage-rooms before gaining the street.

"And this is London?" she asked.

"No, my child," Mrs. Charteris answered; "this is not London. You shall see sunlight and gold. Even in these autumnal days the good sun shines and the soft winds blow. One finds everything in London—even Florence."

Giulietta might have made a reply; but at that moment they found themselves in the waiting-room, and a young fellow came forward and lifted the little old lady from her feet and kissed her half a dozen times.

"Mother darling!" he said; "dear little mother!"

"Jack!" she answered, stroking his face with her gloved hand and smiling up in his face.

And Jack was a fine fellow: dead-up to six feet, with square shoulders and a big chest, long in arm and leg, carrying himself as one who knew how to use fist or foot, if need be. Six men out of every half-dozen would have set him down as an old captain of the Eton eleven. But he was not, mark you! Jack Charteris was one of these whimsical mixtures of cosmopolitanism that one meets every now and again. Dr. Barry, and St. Andrew's, and Heidelberg, and the *quartier Latin* had had their part in the making of him. He was quite at his ease in Paris, Berlin, or London—he was at home nowhere. For it is true that the man who likes all lands loves none; every whit as true as that the man who loves women never loves a woman. Jack Charteris had been blown about the round earth, and everywhere his merry face had made him friends. Now, it is easy enough to make friends—one may do it over a six-penn'oth of Scotch whisky. But Jack Charteris had kept his friends. That is the true touchstone. Be sure that the man who keeps his friends has the true manly fibre in him. Undoubtedly this is a test, but the world does not look on it in this light. At all events, Jack's uncles did not; they had a notion that Jack was that most pitiable of all things—a sad dog. Even his good mother fancied as much.

But then, what the deuce is one to do with a young fellow who has a thousand a year, and writes bad verses, when he might be doubling his income in a dry-saltery? Nothing, of course.

Mrs. Charteris admitted this, sadly, when she chatted with those solemn uncles. But how can one be sad when—— Put it to yourself. Here is a merry, big six-footer picking up a loving little mother and kissing her old sweet face, and——

"Jack my darling!" Mrs. Charteris said. Then she pulled his hair, and kissed him again, and laughed, and the Liverpool Street Station brightened, and there was no fog in the air, and the rain stopped in the streets.

"Well, mother, and did you have a rough passage?" Jack Charteris said.

"Not very stormy," his mother answered. "Jack, this is my friend, Miss Rombinino."

Jack lifted his hat, and turned to the girl with his frank, boyish smile.

"Were you sea-sick?" he asked.

"Not sea-sick," she said slowly; "but it was all very strange. I remember the waves; they clamoured about the ship like dogs waiting to be fed."

"Did you stand in the stern—aft the pilot-house—and crumble up their biscuit?"

"I do not understand," Giulietta answered. "I speak so little English."

"Mother, I appeal to you," Jack said; "Miss Rombinino speaks the language of Shakespeare."

"She should do so," Mrs. Charteris replied, laughing in her low, pleasant way; "she is Juliet."

Jack rose to the occasion.

"And one cannot imagine Juliet sea-sick," he said; "that is, unless one has seen Miss Fortescue."

"Don't be foolish, Jack," his mother said.

"Foolish," he echoed, "mother, do you not know that I am common-sense to the back-bone? Dearest,—I did not mean to say 'dearest,' for you might mistake me for the real little Lord Fauntleroy,—the brougham is waiting."

"Then get our luggage," his mother said smiling; "of course, you know Miss Rombinino is coming home with us."

"To be sure," Jack answered.

Then he set out on his perilous journey through the intricate ways that led to the fastness where the luggage was stored. He recognised the fact that he was a new Stanley in Central Africa, and the rear-guard was waiting.

"Who the mischief," he said to himself, "is that little Niobe—an etching in black and brown—that the *mater* has picked up? And what a face she has! It is like Raphael's Fornarina. No, for her face was rich with sunlight and gold. But—well, one should be done in wax."

This idea fluttered about in Jack's Bohemian brain as he looked up the luggage and swore at the porters, and finally found it all—portmanteaus, trunks, and hampers—safe on the top of the growler, which he ordered to follow the double brougham.

"Come, mother," he said; "and, Miss Rombinino, may I —?"

He handed them into the carriage. Giulietta glanced through the glimmering window; she saw the big 'busses rumbling past; the great vans creeping slowly; the hansom's darting about like water-flies; the crowded pavements; above them all the grey walls, with the windows staring down like eyes. The thick morning, heavy with clinging fog, draped the scene as with dun curtains.

"And this is London," she said, and her heart was sad within her; the gloom of the outer world fell upon her, and she could not push it aside. Then, as in a dream, she saw Florence—all blue and gold—and the black streets frightened her, and the fog choked her. But these things faded, and she saw only a face—the face of a dead man. He lay alone, with a knife in his heart. And she? It was her duty to track the man who had killed him; yes, it was her duty; for who had dared to step between her vengeance and God's judgment? Then she repeated to herself that this man was innocent of Gaetano's death, and the mystery pressed close about her and stifled her like the London fog.

"And this is London?"

Jack Charteris answered.

"London, Miss Rombinino," he said, "is what one makes it—*il inferno* or *il paradiso*. May I quote your Florentine Dante? London is what one makes it. It is bright, and glad, and effervescent, as Paris; it is old, and grey, and dreamy, as Rome; it is harsh and bitter, as Berlin; it is barren and wicked, as New York; it is—in short, this London of ours is what one pleases to make it. One may sit and play with it as children play with alphabet blocks. The letters are here; spell out what words you please!"

"Yes," Giulietta said, "one may spell out every word—but one. Love comes trippingly, and fame comes, and wealth comes; but can one spell out justice?"

"Justice?" Jack asked, in an inquiring tone.

"No," she said; "the day of judgment shall come, and He will deal righteously with the just and the unjust. But we do not know. Perhaps this is best. If we dared judge——"

"Giulietta!" Mrs. Charteris said, and touched the girl's arm.

"I am foolish, am I not?" she said, and looked up at the old lady with a smile that was a petition; "but my thoughts were far away from here."

Jack Charteris fancied that he knew all about women—as one does when one has had no experience. He had gone through his course at St. Andrew's; he had been dubbed "Ph.D." at Heidelberg; he had taken his last degree at the *Café Anglais*. It was quite natural that he should fancy he had read the shifting riddle of femininity.

But this girl utterly puzzled him.

There was something about her that he could not understand; she was strange, and real, and intense. It reminded him of an old chemical experiment—there was a Florentine bulb, and he must leave all the other components aside and find the iron. And there was iron in this girl, could he but touch upon it. Her beauty and all that floated on the top. It was the stark, hard purpose underneath that he sought. Jack Charteris had been an indolent and an aimless man—he had vegetated. Giulietta flared on him like sunlight and stung him into life. Jack himself used this fantastic simile; and afterwards he laughed at it—not then.

The carriage rolled through the city streets; crept with quiet persistence through the Strand, and across Charing Cross, and up the Haymarket; now it was in Piccadilly and on the left hand the Green Park stretched away in a misty gloom, and on the right the shop-lights flickered dimly.

The fog was thick, and black, and yellow—like a whipped cream of noonday and midnight.

"You are very good to take me home with you," Giulietta said; and there was a soft, thankful light in her eyes as she looked at Mrs. Charteris; "you are very good. I should have died in this horrible night; it seems so much like day."

"You are kind to come," Mrs. Charteris said, "and you have been very kind to me. Don't you remember our journey? You did everything for me—all that a daughter could have done."

And Jack said: "Never mind the fog, eh, mother? We

are like the organist in Browning's poem—we carry the sun in our pockets. Only he carried the moon, or should have done so."

Mrs. Charteris did not understand him; Jack was given to vague illusions.

CHAPTER XI.

JACK CHARTERIS IS SURPRISED.

MRS. CHARTERIS' house was "out Fulham-way." As a matter of course it was not in a fashionable atmosphere. To be sure, the Bishop of London has his palace there, and in days gone by Bulwer Lytton lived there,—what time he bit a piece out of his wife's cheek in Craven Cottage,—and even to-day antiquarian gentlemen have a fondness for Fulham. It is in Fulham that Mr. John Morley turns his back on literature and smirks at politics; it is there that Mr. McNeil Whistler winks at art through an eye-glass.

But it must be admitted that Fulham is not fashionable, and the Charteris house was quite out of that part of Fulham that the natives consider aristocratic. It stood in a wilderness of market-gardens, brickfields, and unkempt cottages. But then, there were great high walls about it; and there was a wide park, crowded with trees, where the birds sang; in front the old Thames—*aeons* = old,—

"Goes murmuring by, of king and thrall,
Of war and lordly festival,
Of death—and death is over all;
Laissez faire!"

But this all counts for nothing. All the year the old house is lonely. Then there comes a day when the antique river is bright with pageantry, as it was in the days of the best Henry, when the butcher's boy was cardinal, and the purple barges drifted down to Westminster. And that is the day when one remembers old acquaintances, especially those that live in Fulham or Putney, along the river-bank.

For the old grey river is blue—blue with the dull-blue of Oxford; blue with the sky-blue of Cambridge. Then the boats go past—the sun-browned fellows straining hard with

stretched muscles. Your guineas and mine are thrown into the Thames; the White Lion and the Star and Garter pop—like so many shooting-galleries—with champagne corks; 'Arriet and 'Arry are out, and so is every one else—coster-monger, fakir, pickpocket.

Then Fulham goes dull again, grey with the greyness of desuetude. A year passes ere it come to life, and wretched womanhood changes the Haymarket for the Hammersmith Mall.

And yet the old Charteris house, sturdy, square, of honest red brick, stands there in the wide park, hinting of the bluff, wicked days when George the First was king. Modern county councillors would, doubtless, call the worn mansion "insanitary"; of course, impose a fine, with costs. But Pope knew this house, and Swift knew it, as he journeyed up from Chelsea-way; and Gay and Arbuthnot knew it; and, as Mr. Jack Charteris says, "The County Council be ——!"

In the square hall, by the fireplace, Mrs. Charteris turned and took the young girl in her arms, and kissed her.

"You are welcome, dear," she said; "and I hope you will soon forget the old troubles."

"Thank you," Giulietta answered, "thank you very much. I have found a new friend—a true friend. I do not fear trouble now."

A trim waiting-maid showed her to her room. Jack, puffing hard at his pipe, looked at his mother.

"Now that we are alone," he remarked, "tell me, *mater*, who the mischief this Lady of Seven Sorrows is!"

"I can tell you that in half a dozen words, Jack."

"Dear mother, there was never woman yet who in half a dozen words could say anything."

"Don't cultivate a habit of cheap sarcasm," Mrs. Charteris said laughingly; "it is a sign of a poor spirit. As to Giulietta, she is a daughter of General Rombinino. You remember your Italian history?"

"Whew!" Jack took his pipe from between his lips and whistled.

"I say, *mater*, what is the yarn about her brother? I saw it in the newspapers; murder, wasn't it?"

"No; but I fear her brother was a reckless young man.

I understand that he tried to rob his guardian, and was imprisoned. While in prison he died."

"But where did you stumble across her?" Jack queried; "and how comes she here?"

"It was a chance meeting—in the train. But I have known of the family for years. Your Uncle John, when he was consul at Venice, was quite a pal of the old General."

"Don't be slangy, *mater*," Jack replied. "Well, how comes she here?"

"She is in great trouble. I do not know much; but I am sure that this young Scotchman who was killed in Florence the other day was a friend of hers."

"Kennedy?" Jack asked. "I read of that—a bank chap stabbed in his room."

"Yes. She had no place to go, save a strange hotel. I asked her to stay with us for a few days. She has friends, of course, and I will write to them. In the meantime we will do everything we can; shall we not, Jack?"

"Of course, *mater*."

"I must rest now for half an hour, my son; your mother is an old woman."

"Nonsense, *mater*," Jack said, taking her in his arms; "you are prettier than a peach and younger than your own son."

Mrs. Charteris kissed his face.

"If you love me, I am always young," she answered softly; "and now, Jack, if Miss Rombinino comes down, do your duty, like a wise host."

Mrs. Charteris went to her room; the journey had wearied her, and, in spite of Jack's flattery, she had passed the age when one shrugs one's shoulders at fatigue.

Jack had only taken a turn or two, and finished his pipe, when he heard a light step on the staircase, and that mystical *frou-frou* of silk, and linen, and lace that heralds the coming of femininity *de fin de siècle*. He looked up and saw Giulietta: a mist of black lace about her; her dark hair a tangle of extravagant—if one may use the word in old-time meaning—curls; her large eyes dim and weary, but lit with the fire of intense resolve.

She came straight to him and put out her hand. He took it, and stood for a moment wondering.

"Mr. Charteris," she said, not eagerly, but as one speaks when one has thought clearly and well, "will you come with me for an hour—two hours? I have many things to do, and I do not know this huge black London, and I cannot go alone. I want to see some one—an officer of the department of police."

She said this with quaint earnestness and all the prim mannerisms of convent days. Jack was dazed for a bit. Young women, even those of the end of the century, do not make such requests on an hour's acquaintance. At all events, the experience was new to Jack Charteris, and he had had experience in most corners of the earth. It reminded him of something that happened in the Barbadoes: he met a fat, old negress, with yellow turban and naked feet, waddling along, and looked at her with natural, if verdant, curiosity; she was, to him, a new specimen.

"Doan' y' luk at me; I'se 'Badian bawn!" the old negress cried angrily, and struck him in the face.

In some way or other, Giulietta's sudden request—eminently Southern in its direct simplicity—recalled that unlooked-for mishap along the yellow quays in the New World. He hesitated and stammered, and then said,—

"Why, y' know, Miss Rombinino, of course I shall be very happy; but, y' know, if you want a policeman, I'll send for one. In fact, I think there's one below-stairs, about dinner-time, every evening. By the way, what do you want to do with him?"

She did not understand Jack's easy banter; she hardly noticed it; she was thinking of those two men who were dead in Italy. But she knew that she must make an explanation—make him understand.

"There is a man," she said, "who has been murdered—in Florence—in Italy. I must find out who has killed him. Do you not understand?"

"Let us sit down and talk," Jack answered more seriously, and he led her to a seat near the fireplace.

"May I smoke?" he asked. "Thank you. Now we are comfortable. Will you tell me what you wish to do? I will help you, if possible."

"Yes, yes, yes," she went on, in her nervous, fervid way; "yes, you will help me. I must find one of your great

officers of the department of the police. He will go and take the man who has killed Signore Kennedy: then I shall know all."

Jack said quietly: "Miss Rombinino, it is not very clear. You speak of this bank chap Kennedy, who was killed in Florence. Do you mean that you want some one to find out who killed him?"

"Yes."

"But why not leave it to your police in Florence?"

This query was not easy to answer. Giulietta had no facts, no data, no real information. She had only one thing: a mission to find out the man who had killed Kennedy. She felt that she was in a mist and mystery of plots and evil purposes, and this, she dreamed, was the clue. Gaetano? No; she must go straight to the goal. This last crime was the flower of all the wicked work, and she must trace a way back to the root. Thinking these thoughts, she sat looking at the fire. Then she faced Jack.

"I do not know," she said; "I only know that this murderer must be found. And I feel that I shall do it! Do you think that foolish? Well, perhaps, we are foolish—in the South, where the air is like wine and the sun is a soothsayer who tells all things hidden. Please do not thwart me! Let me follow my own inspiration. And you will help me?"

This was all very fine, but Jack was nothing if not practical. There was a sort of *gradgrind* ring in his voice as he asked,—

"Facts, facts; will you give me the facts?"

"I know nothing," she answered; "we must discover the facts."

CHAPTER XII.

AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE.

JACK CHARTERIS had listened with no great interest; but now a shadow of her own earnestness fell upon him. In spite of all her evasions, he felt that she had a clear, well-grounded suspicion of the murderer of Berwyn Kennedy.

"I will help you if I can," he said. "Tell me all you know."

Giulietta spoke abruptly, eagerly, with growing passion.

"Listen!" she cried. "My brother was sent to prison for robbing my guardian."

"Name, please?" Jack put in.

"My guardian? Montecinque."

"Has he control of the property left by your father?"

"To be sure; he holds it in trust."

"Very well; go on."

"And my guardian told me that he had done all he could to save Gaetano—everything. And he lied! he lied! he lied! He said that Kennedy's evidence sent my brother to prison. It was not true. I read it yesterday—no! It was Montecinque who did this—it was he who sought Kennedy's death—he suggested it."

Giulietta hurried on in a feverish way—the words were merely stepping-stones for her thoughts.

"Suggested it—suggested Kennedy's death?" Jack exclaimed; "when—to whom?"

And then the young girl shuddered, and a sudden coldness and fear fell upon her—the shadow of the oath she swore one night in Val d'Ema. She could not answer at once. At last she faced and looked at Charteris, and said firmly,—

"I will try and tell you all I know. My guardian said once that he wished that Kennedy were dead; he said once

that Kennedy had sent my brother to prison—and unjustly; he said once that he himself tried to save my brother. He lies and speaks the truth. When he does the one or the other I do not know. But of this I am sure: it is Montecinque who killed my brother—Montecinque killed Kennedy.”

“I say, Miss Rombinino,” Jack said; “you know, that’s rather strong! You say Montecinque killed this bank chap the other day, and you hint that he had a reason; but, y’ know, you can’t accuse people in that way. Your guardian seems to be a scoundrel, and probably is, most guardians are. But what reason had he for committing such a crime?”

“What reason?”

“Yes; look at it in your own way. Your brother was sent to prison for robbing Montecinque; is that correct?”

“Yes,” the girl said, in a low voice, and looked Jack Charteris full in the face.

“On whose evidence?”

“Montecinque’s,” she answered.

“But your guardian told you that it was on the evidence offered by Kennedy?”

“Yes.”

“Very well, then. It is clear that he lied, but one may lie and yet not murder. He had a reason, drawn from a good motive, perhaps, for deceiving you, and he did not scruple to call a falsehood to his assistance. But why should he have wished to kill Kennedy? There was nothing to lead him to do that.”

“You do not help me!” the girl cried bitterly; “you do not understand! But I only ask one thing of you—take me to one of these detectives. I am not poor; I will pay him; and he shall make this evil man suffer, as——”

“As Montecinque has made others suffer,” Jack added, for she left the sentence unfinished.”

“It is just and right,” she said.

Jack filled his pipe again.

“Look here, Miss Rombinino; your sense is so awfully uncommon, y’ know, and I’m only a poor common-place chap—plucked twice—with the commonest sort of sense. But will you take a bit of advice? now, please do!”

“Yes, I have asked you to help me.”

"Well, don't you think the best thing is to let all this knife-stabbing business slide—'let it pace,' as Chaucer's old monk says. You know, this is jolly old England, and such things——"

"It is true," she remarked sadly, "this is England, Mr. Charteris, and in my country it is all so different. There it is all sunlight, but men's hearts are black; here the skies are all dark, but I fancied that men's hearts were gold. No, you do not see, you do not feel as I do. I am sorry that I have annoyed you. Yes, I am sure I have troubled you with my story. I was excited, but now I am calm again. I thank you very much. Your mother has been so good to me—I must thank her too. Then, to-morrow, I will set about my task."

Jack rubbed his nose reflectively; knocked the ashes out of his pipe and put it in the case.

"No, that won't do," he said; "of course not. What would the *mater* say? And then," he added with a sudden, boyish smile, "what would I say? No, that's out of the question. And these detective chaps that you refer to are awfully stupid, I assure you. Have you ever read Gaboriau, or any of those chaps? I beg your pardon; of course not. Well, they have translated the plain-clothes officer into a little demigod. Now, you see, he's nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he is a 'bobby' translated into a public-house loafer. He has the regular 'bobby' swing, the mechanical gait, the thumping boots, the drilled imbecility—all that sort of business of the chap who eats the cold fowls in the kitchen. Don't you know, they are deuced stupid, these chaps? They are costermongers in uniform or out of it. If I can help you, you know, of course I will. And if this guardian of yours has played the rascal in that way, I'll punch his head for him with pleasure. If you want him hanged, I'll see to it that he makes a twice-told tale of the proverb about Haman."

Giulietta had listened, but his words made only a vague impression on her. She was thinking of what she herself should do—of the net she should throw over Montecinque, bringing him down in a tangle of disgrace and suffering. Jack too had been thinking. He was an indolent fellow,—a twice-plucked chap, as he described himself,—but this

whimsical adventure was enough to sting a lizard into activity. Into his matter-of-fact English life, that only the Liverpool Cup or the Derby stirred now and again faintly, there had come a tempestuous Italian sirocco—a hot wind murmuring murder, and stratagems, and love. Love, beyond doubt. One does not look into eyes like those of Giulietta without feeling the pulse throb and the heart beat a quick step. And according to philosophers of this day and generation—elderly gentlemen, they are, in spectacles and frock-coats, who sit in musty German lecture-rooms, and so, of course, know all about it—love is merely a physical exertion, and undue nervous excitation arising from glandular disturbances. Jack Charteris knew nothing of this *fin de Siècle* theory of love, but something or other stirred about his heart, as he looked at the young girl sitting there in the firelight, white, and tragic, and beautiful as one of the women of Sophocles.

And so it came about that after a minute he said with more real energy and purpose than one would have looked for in a Jack Charteris—such a Jack Charteris as one meets in the club—and with a tenderness that left no room for banter, “Will you let me try and do this thing for you? May I bring this man to his punishment? I am sure I can do this, for I shall work with a faithfulness that no one you could hire could offer. Then I think it is all very simple. May I go to Florence and do this for you?”

He added those last two words unintentionally, but as he thought it over, those were the only words he had meant to say. To Giulietta they meant nothing; to her he was nothing but an instrument—like a railway train that takes one to this place or that. This was something different, she thought; he might succeed, she could do nothing else at present. God had given her friends, and God was very good. She would trust the impulse of the moment.

“After this,” she said, “years after this, you will be glad that you did this work, shouldered this burden; for you will know that you have done right and made justice possible. Yes, I thank you. You are a friend. I think”—and the thought flashed across her then, as a bat flares past a lighted window,—“I think you are like one of those

old knights who went out to fight for what was pure, and good, and right."

"Hysteria," Jack said to himself. "But I don't mind the business; it's an adventure sure enough, and has the real sensational ring."

That pipe of his always needed filling: he stuffed in the tobacco, puffed at a dull coal on the top, then he said aloud to Giulietta: "You are awfully kind to trust me—people don't as a general rule. You know, I was plucked twice, and I'm not a clever chap anyway. But you won't mind giving me a point or two, will you?"

"What can I say? How can I help you?" she asked.

"Well, this guardian of yours—— No, first of all, where did Berwyn Kennedy come from?"

"He was a Scotchman. I did not know him well, but I remember that he said he was going to Stirling."

"He said he was going?" Jack queried.

"Yes," she replied; "that is the name of the city. He bade me good-bye, and then——"

"Never mind," Jack broke in; "that is all I cared to know. I'm a methodical sort of chap, and like to start at the post. Of course, he is common property now, and there will be little difficulty in finding out all about him. That is the first step. After that——"

As a matter-of-fact the "after that" was all darkness. Jack was what is called a "slow thinker"; he wanted to get by himself and look over the ground. Perhaps it was fortunate that at that moment Mrs. Charteris came in. She put her hand on Jack's shoulder, but it was to Giulietta that she spoke.

"Forgive me for leaving you," she said, "but you should know by this time that I and Sancho Panza are of one mind as far as sleep is concerned. Ah, there is the luncheon bell!"

"My dear *mater*," said Jack to her, laughing, "you have coupled the two best things in life—sleeping and eating."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD LAWYER THINKS HE KNOWS.

JACK thought matters over carefully, and came to the same conclusion that Giulietta had reached. Judging from the facts she had given him, Montecinqe was undoubtedly responsible for Kennedy's death. The first thing to do, the natural thing, was to go to Florence at once; but on second thoughts Jack decided to do nothing of the sort.

"It's in Scotland the fellow lived," he said to himself, "and it's in Scotland this investigation must begin."

So it fell out that Jack found himself whirling northward toward Stirling. He was alone in the carriage; alone, that is, with his pipe and his thoughts. It must be admitted that he felt a trifle foolish and quixotic; yet he was well pleased with himself after all. He had something to do, and it was to be done for a pretty woman. This is always pleasant. Giulietta too was one of those women for whom men are always committing follies.

Jack Charteris had an old friend in Stirling, an elderly youth, named Donald Ferguson. They had been at St. Andrew's together, and ever since had kept up a desultory, but friendly correspondence. Evidently Donald Ferguson had begun that agreeable but difficult operation of "making a name for himself." It was "writ large," among a long row of Macs and Dhuss on the door of a set of chambers in High Street. This sign told "all and singular" that a firm of lawyers, of whom Ferguson was last and not least, could be seen any day except, of course, the "Sawbath."

A little red-headed office boy with a very large mouth was in the ante-room; he was pulling hairs out of the tail of a luckless kitten. Jack sent in his card, and in a few moments his friend bustled out.

He was a spare, hairless young man, old looking and

wise ; thirty years before, he had been a spare, hairless infant, every whit as old looking and wise. They shook hands two or three times ; then Ferguson led his visitor into the den that served him for private office. A bottle of Glenlivet, two glasses, and a jug of water were produced. They helped themselves, and sat chatting.

"What guid has blawn thee here, mon ?" Donald asked.

"It was a rough wind for some one else," said Jack ; "but I'll spin you the whole tale."

Jack went on to relate the history of Kennedy's death, and added that he had come to Stirling to learn something of the man's early life and of his family.

"Kennedy ?" Donald repeated. "I can't help you, I fear. I never heard of the man. But stay ; Old Davie will know."

"And who's Old Davie ?"

"Our Mr. Davidson. He is an encyclopædia in broad-cloth. I'll introduce you, and you may put what questions you please."

Mr. David Davidson was the senior partner of the firm ; he was a man of sixty, with reddish-white hair, a clean shaven, angular face, and grey eyes that peered out suspiciously under the red eyebrows. He was dressed in decent black clothes, and wore a stiff white stock about his scraggy throat. Altogether he looked like a dissenting minister in whom piety had left room for a great deal of canniness. He greeted Jack pleasantly, and, when they were left alone, waited for the business to be opened.

"You see," said Jack, "I'm sorry to trouble you ; but I want to find out something about a chap. Ferguson said you might know——"

"Weel, weel," the old lawyer broke in, "wha's the 'chap,' as ye ca' him ? I dinna say that I can asseest you, Mr. Charteris, and I dinna say I will asseest you, but wha's the man ye're speering about ?"

"That's fair enough, I'm sure, Mr. Davidson," Jack replied ; "the man is Kennedy—Berwyn Kennedy. The first name is an odd one, and I fancied might be easily traced."

"Old Davie" did not show any sign of having heard the name before, but his cautious eyes seemed to shrink further

back under the bushy eyebrows, and he looked at Jack shrewdly for a moment or so before speaking. He had made his fortune by attending to a certain sage Scotch proverb: "If anybody speers at ye, say, 'Ye dinna ken.'" He did not forget it now.

"What's your beesiness wi' him, Mr. Charteris?" he asked.

"I want to find out something about his family and his life here," Jack answered readily.

The two men made a pretty contrast—"Old Davie" weighing every word, studying the other's face, playing a waiting game; Jack, frank and impetuous, a trifle impatient, and anxious to get a decisive answer.

"Are you of the law?"

"No," Jack returned, a little brusquely; "and I assure you, Mr. Davidson, I am a very harmless, unimportant person. If you can tell me who Berwyn Kennedy's people are, and where he lived here, I shall be very much obliged; if not—I shall be very much obliged."

"Perhaps," Old Davie said, looking at Jack Charteris with "prodeegious" shrewdness, "perhaps it'll be Mr. Kennedy himself who sent you here to find out these things."

Jack looked up in amazement; then he smiled.

"Well, to tell the truth—no," he said; "you see, he's dead."

"Dead!"

"There's no doubt about that, I fear, Mr. Davidson," Jack went on; "he's dead as Marley. Now perhaps you'll tell me whether you can give me any assistance. The man was murdered."

The old lawyer had recovered his self-possession; he took a pinch of snuff, rubbed his long chin for a minute, then he said,—

"Yes, I can asseest you, Mr. Charteris; but in the first place tell me everything you know about this unholy wark."

Jack narrated the events as he knew them as shortly as possible: he referred to Montecinqe and his two wards; to Giulietta's certainty that Montecinqe was the murderer; to his own half doubt; to the published reports of the crime.

Old Davie listened attentively. When Jack ceased speaking he was silent for a few minutes. At last he said,—

“You have given me very important information, Mr. Charteris. I think I can give you a hint, for I think I know who killed Mr. Kennedy.”

“Montecinq?” asked Jack.

“No,” Old Davie said unhesitatingly.

“Who then, in Heaven’s name?” Jack cried impatiently.

“I will give you a few facts, Mr. Charteris, and you may answer your own question.”

“Let me hear them.”

“First, if you please, I will call in your friend, Mr. Donald Ferguson—a very wise young man; then there can be no chance of a misunderstanding.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SIN AND THE LEGACY.

THE three men sat about the table in the musty office. Donald Ferguson was taking notes with a quill pen that grated on the rough paper; Jack smoked and listened; the old lawyer was talking in a low, cautious voice.

"His father," he said, referring to the elder Kennedy, "was a client of mine for many years. He had a small property near St. Ninian's that brought him in a few hundreds a year. Berwyn Kennedy was his only son, and inherited the little estate. This was over ten years ago, when Berwyn was twenty years old. He took his affairs into his own hands, and I have seen him but twice since that time. Once was on the occasion of his marriage."

"I did not know he was married," Jack said.

"He married his cousin, a Miss Kennedy. A few months after the wedding she left him. She did not go alone, of course."

"Women rarely do."

The old lawyer did not notice the flippant interruption; he continued, in his calm, measured way,—

"She left the house one afternoon, and took the night train to London. There she met an old lover of hers, a man named Heathcote. He was an officer in the army; but he threw up his commission, and fled with her. They went to Paris. There the wronged husband discovered them. In a panic of fear they left Paris, and hid themselves in a little German town in the Black Forest. Again he found their hiding-place, and again they fled. It does not seem that he molested them; he simply followed them, and hung over them like a shadow. He was a cold, stern man, like his father, and probably was waiting until his

vengeance was ripe before striking the blow. Perhaps in their constant fear and shame in his presence, he found his revenge. These are suppositions, but the facts I have stated."

Mr. Davidson paused.

"He must have been a cold-blooded chap," said Jack.

"For a number of years I have not heard of him, even indirectly, until to-day, when your young friend"—he looked at his partner, and then bowed to Jack in his formal way—"brings me news that he is dead. I am sorry; I am deeply sorry."

"You know," Jack spoke up, "I didn't imagine you could be concerned, or I should not have spoken so abruptly."

"You mistake me," the old lawyer said drily; "it is not a sentimental sorrow. We must all die, Mr. Charteris; and some be fore-ordained to salvation, and others to eternal damnation, as the good Book says, and a very consoling doctrine it is. No, my sorrow is not sentimental; it is pecuniary."

"Then I am sure," said Jack, paying a dubious compliment, "that my apology is all the more necessary."

Old Davie took snuff.

"Two months ago," he continued, "I learned that old Andrew Berwyn, of Ayrshire, was dead, and that this young man, Berwyn Kennedy, was his heir. The estate is very large. I will not conceal from you that I expected the business affairs of Mr. Berwyn Kennedy would fall into the hands of his father's faithful adviser.

"But let that pass.

"I did not know his address, for, as I said, I had not heard from him for years. But I happened to know where his wife was living. At all events, I found out this much by diligent inquiry. Three weeks ago I wrote to her, asking if she could give me news of Berwyn Kennedy, and advising her of the death of his great-uncle. I have the answer here; I received it two days ago."

Mr. Davidson unlocked a drawer in his writing-table, took out the letter, unfolded it carefully, and read it aloud.

It was couched in these words,—

"Sir,—

"I am sorry that I can give you no information of Mr. Berwyn Kennedy; I have not seen him for some time, and believe that he is dead.

"EDNA HEATHCOTE."

"Where does she live?" asked Jack.

"In Florence, Italy."

"My God!" Jack cried, "and he was murdered there!"

"Yes," the old lawyer answered calmly; "and what then?"

"What is the date of the letter?"

"November 13th," Mr. Davidson replied.

"The day before the murder!"

"Yes," Mr. Davidson continued; "and I might point out a curious phrase in the letter. She believes him dead—the next morning he is found dead."

"But could any one be fool enough, mad enough, to write such a transparently false and foolish letter?" Jack exclaimed.

"A woman could," the lawyer answered, "and a woman has done so."

"But she must have known that, sooner or later, you would find out Berwyn Kennedy, even if this murder had not made prominent his whereabouts."

"One would have thought so."

"Poor fellow!" Jack said, with a sudden touch of pity for the dead man; heretofore he had thought of him merely as y in the algebraic problem, where he had to find x ; "poor fellow! After losing his wife, death steps in and 'does him' out of a fortune! By the way, who gets the estate?"

"The next-of-kin is his cousin, formerly a Miss Kennedy," Old Davie said, watching Jack's face shrewdly, "and now Mrs. Berwyn Kennedy, widow."

"His wife!"

"The woman who wrote this letter," Davidson replied, tapping the paper with his long lean fingers.

"Then you think——"

"No, no, Mr. Charteris; you have come to me for facts. Frankly I have told you all the facts in my possession. But I do not think."

With this "Old Davie" stood up and took a fresh pinch of snuff, and Jack, taking this as a hint that the conversation was at an end, thanked him and went out. His friend, Donald Ferguson, followed him.

"I'll take a drop of your whisky, old fellow," Jack said. "Thank you! By Jove! didn't your worthy partner a tale unfold! But I'm glad I've heard it. My infernal good nature has mixed me up in this affair. As I told you, I have promised to see justice done, and I am glad the end is in sight. It was a lucky thought my coming up here."

"What shall you do?"

"Go to Florence at once," Jack answered, "and follow the trail. By Jove! this is better sport than fox-hunting."

"Take time, lad," Donald said. "Stay with me this night, and to-morrow——"

"Don't ask me, old chap. I must be off at once," Jack said. "No; another time I should be delighted to have a 'jaw' over old times, but you must let me off now."

"Good luck follow you then, Jack," Donald returned; "and look to your weapons—the worst foe is the one in petticoats."

"Don't fear for me," Jack laughed. "I trust a woman as I do the weather. I always carry an umbrella."

Jack made his adieus and went down to the station. There was an hour before his train went. He ordered a chop at the Red Lion, and walked up and down the cosy parlour, thinking over the remarkable history the old lawyer had related. He tabulated his facts—mentally but clearly.

In the first place, Montecinque. He had no motive, as far as Jack could see. Giulietta was doubtless influenced in her opinion by prejudice and personal dislike; the reasons for imagining him guilty were shadowy and improbable.

In the second place, the Heathcotes, or, rather, the woman who called herself Mrs. Heathcote, had two strong motives: she lived in constant dread of her husband's vengeance—at the least, she had exposure to fear; again, he stood between her and a fortune. In fact he was a decided obstacle in her way.

This seemed plain enough.

The day before Kennedy was murdered she had written that he was dead, she supposed. That she had not heard

of him for years was evidently false, as he was in Florence at the time; that she supposed him dead was, of course, equally false. But the suggestion of death stood too near the murder, Jack reasoned, to be altogether a coincidence.

He finished his luncheon and took the southern-bound train. He was confident that he was on the "right track." It might be that this woman could prove an *alibi*, he thought; but, in any case, he was sure that her hand had set the machinery in motion.

"*En avant!* Now for Florence!" he said half aloud, as the train rumbled along; "and I believe I have news for Signorina Rombinino. It is all very delightful—quite in the Surrey Theatre vein. Wronged husband, aristocratic villain, and pretty—of course she is pretty—murderess. Florence for a background, and a fortune that tumbles out of the clouds."

Jack felt like an every-day gentleman plumped down unexpectedly into a transpontine melodrama.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

MR. JACK CHARTERIS reached London in the morning, and drove at once to his mother's house. Mrs. Charteris had not come down yet, but Giulietta was in the breakfast room. She looked pale and weary, an anxious-eyed ghost in a grey morning gown. She greeted him without eagerness; she had thought his journey a foolish waste of time, when every hour seemed to her a century. And then she knew, as Jack did not, of the dark, mysterious power that had determined that Kennedy should die. She wished him to go to Florence at once. She hoped that this young Englishman—brave, and true, and alert—might be strong enough to bring Montecinqe to justice, in spite of the *Mafia*. She did not fear for him; a woman fears for the safety only of those she loves. And Giulietta did not love Jack Charteris; he was nothing to her but a brain to think, a heart to dare, a hand to strike a blow. She thought of him as an impersonal instrument in the efficiency of which she could confidently trust. Jack would not have been flattered, few of us "men-things" (as Browning calls us) would be flattered, if we knew what the "women-things" (as Browning does not say) think of us.

"Good-morning," Jack says; "I have returned, you see."

This was a self-evident fact, for he stood there glowing with youth and good spirits, in spite of his two nights' journey.

"Yes, I am very glad to see you," Giulietta replied. "Was your journey successful?"

"Miss Rombinino," Jack went on, concealing the elation he felt under affected grandiloquence, "I have the honour of informing you that I know who murdered Mr. Berwyn Kennedy."

"Mont——"

"No, not Montecinque," Jack said, interrupting her; "your guardian is innocent, I am sure."

"Who then?" she cried impetuously.

"The person who murdered Berwyn Kennedy was a woman, and she calls herself Edna Heathcote."

"Edna Heathcote!" she cried, in dazed amazement; "but I do not understand what you mean."

"It is perfectly true," Jack answered; "he was killed by a woman who calls herself Edna Heathcote, and who——"

"What! my friend?"

"By Jove! I hope she is no friend of yours."

"But she is my friend; she was very kind to me," Giulietta said warmly. "It is impossible!"

"I assure you, I am certain that she caused his death. You have asked me to find out who killed this fellow Kennedy, and I have evidence that points out the guilty one."

"But I won't have my friend guilty!" Giulietta cried passionately. "I will not have her guilty! It is infamous! It is false!"

Jack watched this feminine whirlwind for a moment; then he sank into a chair in a helpless fashion. Decidedly this "beat Banagher."

"You know, Miss Rombinino, I'm very sorry, but, y' see, I didn't do it," he said apologetically.

"Oh, forgive me," she said, still trembling with excitement; "I did not know what I was saying, it was so shocking. But I am certain that you have made a fearful mistake; I cannot forget what I know, what I have heard."

"Deuce take it! I should like to know what she has heard," Jack thought.

"Will you tell me what you learned?" she asked.

Jack related the whole wretched story of shame and wrong: told her how the young wife had fled with Heathcote; how Kennedy had followed them, haunted them constantly; and mentioned the letter sent by Edna the day before the murder.

She listened with growing wonder; all the evil seemed

lost in the strangeness; she had not known that these things happened in the world.

"And she introduced him to me!" she said at last.

Jack jumped to his feet.

"Introduced you to him! In Heaven's name, Miss Rombinino, has anything else happened? When was this?"

"Two days before he was found dead; it was in the evening,"

"Tell me everything you remember," he said imperiously.

"It was in the drawing-room at the Pension Bellini," Giulietta replied; "Mrs. Heathcote and Captain Heathcote came in, and asked me to go to the opera with them. I do not remember what was said, but I looked up and saw him in the doorway. I think they were embarrassed, for no one spoke for some time. Then Mrs. Heathcote introduced him. It seems very strange," she said; "it is a great crime, but I am sure that she did not kill him. It is another wrong; there seems to be nothing but sin and evil in the world."

"But look at the facts in the case, Miss Rombinino," Jack said, "and look at the motive. I do not assert that she did it with her own hand."

"No," Giulietta put in firmly, although she had turned very pale; "no, I do not believe a woman could kill a man—in that way."

Jack did not notice her emotion; he was thinking of Kennedy's presence in that drawing-room. The evidence was growing stronger. It was clear that when Kennedy appeared that night his guilty wife knew that the long delayed and always expected blow was about to fall—exposure, perhaps worse. In addition, she had in her possession the old lawyer's letter, announcing the newly left fortune.

"Will you try and think, Miss Rombinino," he asked, after a pause, "whether this impressed you as being an unexpected visit?"

"I am sure it was—we were going to the opera. And then, I do not think he had ever been there before. As I remember the scene now, in the light of what you have told

me, I am confident that he came suddenly, and perhaps with a purpose."

"And you, perhaps, stood in the way?"

"It may be. I wished to leave, but Mrs. Heathcote kept me beside her."

"To be sure. And he did not call again?"

"The next day; but they were out. He called on me."

Jack stifled the exclamation of surprise that rose to his lips.

"What happened?"

"I do not remember—nothing—I was ill. He said he was going away—to Stirling. I was ill."

Giulietta's face was like that of a dead woman. Her voice was strained and broken. But with a great effort she regained command of herself.

"I had just left the convent, you know," she added, more calmly, "and I had heard of my brother's——"

"Forgive me," Jack said softly; "I should not question you. But it is for your own sake; it will help me to fulfil the mission you have given me. This afternoon I shall go to Florence; and, believe me, I shall find out the truth."

"I shall go with you," she said.

"Perhaps you had better do so," he said, after a moment's consideration; "it can be arranged in some way. I should not wonder if I could tempt the *mater* to make the journey. She only came to London to keep an eye on her graceless son."

Giulietta went to her room to make the necessary preparations. Jack, who had breakfasted *en route*, smoked a meditative pipe, and waited for his mother to come down. Mrs. Charteris was an enemy of the vicious habit of early rising. She took her tea and toast in bed in a sober Christian fashion. It was eleven o'clock when she made her appearance.

"Nanette told me you arrived an hour ago," she said, kissing Jack's forehead and tumbling his curls. "Are you tired with all your travelling?"

"No, *mater*; fresh as a new laid egg," Jack answered; "and I have a jolly bit of gossip for you."

"You know I disapprove of anything of the sort," Mrs. Charteris said severely, and, like the dear, inconsequential

woman she was, settled herself comfortably to listen to it. Jack had had time to get his facts arranged in dramatic order; the story lost nothing by his telling. Mrs. Charteris accompanied it with a series of "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" expressive of varying emotions. If theatrical managers would only imitate the good Mrs. Charteris when the young author is reading his play, it would add greatly to his pleasure, and it would not hurt them. They could throw him out of the window afterwards just as well.

"And now, mother," Jack said, when the recital came to an end, "I am going to Florence, and I know you would never trust your innocent son there alone, so——"

"You are going?"

"Yes, *mater*—you, and I, and Miss Rombinino," Jack said.

It did not require much urging to induce Mrs. Charteris to consent. As a matter of fact, she did not know what else to do. She felt that she was wandering in a bewildered sort of way through a three-volumed novel, and Florence, it occurred to her, was a decidedly better environment than Fulham.

And so that day there was "packing" in Charteris house; in the evening the three travellers took the club train for Paris; the next evening they were in the *stazione centrale* of Florence.

This was the beginning of the end—the first step on the path that led to the goal.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE FLORENTINE CLUB.

ON the suggestion of Mrs. Charteris, the three travellers went to a quiet little hotel in the Via Montebello. Giuletta did not leave the house; she communicated with none of her acquaintances.

Jack, however, was out and about, as the phrase goes. At *Vieusseux's* he met an old friend, a big, bibulous Englishman, who published an English paper, devoted to "colony" gossip, and lunched with him at "The Club."

"The Club," as every one knows, is the Florentine. It has pleasant apartments in the Via Borgo Ognissanti, and the smoking-room windows look out on the Ponte Carraga, and across the Arno. They were loafing in this room over post-prandial cigarettes, and Jack was questioning his friend about the Kennedy murder.

"My dear boy," the journalist was saying, "I know nothing more than you do. I met the man once or twice, that is all. It is an old story here now. The police—you know something of our police—are not especially clever. The 'Kennedy case' has drifted into the limbo of undiscovered crimes."

"What sort of a chap was he?" Jack asked.

"A dry-as-dust fellow. He was not a member," the journalist concluded, for to him one who was not a "member of the club" was outside the pale of interest.

Then they fell to talking about other things; men drifted in and out; one of these—a grim, grey, soldierly man—attracted Jack's attention.

"Who is he?"

"Wait; I will call him over—a fine fellow," the journalist said; "that is Captain Heathcote—a jolly good chap when you know him."

"But I suppose," Jack added, "you've got to know him first?"

"Yes; he's one of your hard-shelled crabs, but inside—excellent."

Captain Heathcote came up, and was introduced to Jack Charteris. He had known some cousin twice removed—it is odd, but every one knows something about some one else—and the conversational ice was soon broken.

"Of course, Florence is delightful," Jack was saying, "but I should not care to live here. There is a sort of miasmatic indolence in the air that plays the deuce with one. In fact, one does not live here—one vegetates."

"There is truth in that," Captain Heathcote returned; "but why not vegetate?"

"I had never thought of that," Jack replied, "but perhaps you are right. I daresay, if one gets used to this æsthetic idleness, it seems pleasant enough; but a rousing north wind, cracking through the trees, is not to be despised. Take it of a windy morning, now, with the red sun coming up, and the hounds——"

"Florence is exile," said the Captain harshly, "you are quite right. No one would live here if——"

Then the journalist broke in: "But one can get excellent champagne for seven francs, and this Toscatio—a very good wine—is only five francs a flask."

"Ay," said Jack, "but what does *Bass* cost, old man?"

"That has the true Brummagem ring."

"Not a particle," said Jack stoutly; "we are both Philistines—I am the common-place English sort, and *you* are plated with Florentine gold. As for all these lank, angular saints, and fat, beefy Venuses, strung up in the Uffizzi, I don't care twopence. Neither do you."

"Don't get argumentative, dear boy," the journalist said. "I don't live in Florence for art's sake, I assure you. Baudelaire said he wanted to go to Paradise because it was pleasant and cheap; that is the reason I live in Florence."

"Doubtless it is pleasant and cheap," Jack answered; "but I would not spend my life here unless I were chained."

"No one," said Captain Heathcote, more seriously perhaps than the *tone* of the flippant conversation demanded,

"no one would live out of England were he not forced to do so."

Jack Charteris heard this remark with no surprise; knowing the circumstances as well as he did, he did not wonder at Captain Heathcote's desire to see again the land from which he had barred himself. He even felt a sort of pity for the man—tangled in the web of a woman, who had hesitated at no crime. It never crossed his mind for a moment that Captain Heathcote might be implicated in the murder; no one could have fancied this. There was regret and life-weariness in his fine, handsome face, but no shadow of blood-guiltiness. It was not the face of a man who had sinned deeply, but of one who had lost hope and buried ambition. A sudden sympathy for this man—exiled and linked to an animate crime—grew strong within him. And when the journalist joined a noisier and gayer group, Jack drew his chair closer, and carried on the conversation in the same vein.

"You have not been in England for some time?" he asked.

"No," Captain Heathcote replied; "I have not crossed the channel for ten years."

"By Jove!" Jack exclaimed; "I should fancy you would have an itching—a *cacoëthes*, as we said at school—to see the old home again. I, for my part, can't stay long away. Italy is all very well for a short jaunt; Paris is good enough for a week; I don't mind Norway when the salmon are up—but ten years!"

"In a few days I shall return," the Captain said, with the pleasant light of anticipation in his eyes, "and I dare say the white cliffs will look whiter than ever."

"Yes," said Jack, "and the grey streets greyer; more smoke goes up and more fog comes down."

But, in spite of this light answer, he was thinking very seriously. If they were going to London, it was necessary that he should act at once. First of all, he concluded, he must go to the scene of the crime,—that was the orthodox detective procedure,—and then he must see Mrs. Heathcote. He would go to her brusquely, abruptly; tell her the facts he had, and if a confession followed, well and good; if not, he would place the affair in the hands of the police.

These thoughts went rapidly through his mind, and there

was no perceptible hesitation in his reply when Captain Heathcote spoke.

"Come and drive with me, will you not?"

"I'm sure I shall be delighted," Jack Charteris said; "I've not been in the Cascine this season."

"It is not much changed," the Captain returned: "the same foolish people, and the same bad horses, and the same green trees and dusty drives. I don't keep horses, but Mrs. Heathcote and I drive every afternoon for an hour or so."

Jack had accepted the invitation with the vague purpose of emphasizing his acquaintance with Heathcote; his ultimate object, of course, was to learn what he could of Edna Heathcote. Learning that he was to meet her at once, he took his good fortune philosophically. He left the club, after a nodded good-bye to his friend, and strolled toward the Pension Bellini with Captain Heathcote.

All this planning, and scheming, and under-the-rose work was not to Jack's taste, but there is a sort of pleasure in "the chase"—whether one is chasing a woman or a wild boar. And, in addition, Jack's scruples vanished easily enough when he thought of Giulietta, of her eyes—her eyes rather pleased him—and of the promise he had given. He repeated a phrase he had used once before when he said that she was a woman for whom men commit follies. But Giulietta was more than this to Jack Charteris. She had come into his life in a sensational way; she had dragged him into a new melodramatic world—in the truest sense of the word she was an interest. After that comes love. A man does not meet a woman under these circumstances many times, especially if the woman is Giulietta, before Cupid is at his old tricks. In these days we keep Cupid out of literature, but he plays his part in life just the same. And Jack, in his frank, honest way, had learned to love Giulietta as men do love women now and again—truly and tenderly. But as yet he was only half aware of this. He was busy in his search for the murderer, and yet he was thinking of Giulietta every hour in the day. One can do a great deal of thinking about a young woman without being aware of the fact; this is a sort of unconscious mental cerebration very much affected by lovers.

There was one thing that troubled Jack Charteris more than he cared to acknowledge even to himself—this was Giulietta's attitude towards him. It was strained and unnatural. One would have said his mere presence made her ill at ease. This had been especially marked since the day when he had announced to her that Edna Heathcote was concerned in Kennedy's death. Giulietta, on her part, clung firmly to the belief that Montecinqe, and he alone, was responsible. Had Jack known the grounds on which she based her belief, he might have been of the same opinion. As it was, he only knew such facts as she had been disposed to reveal to him. Of the part which she had played in the tragedy he had no knowledge. This she had not dared to confess. And now she lived in constant dread of his learning it for himself.

"He will find me out," she kept saying to herself.

"She does not trust me," he was thinking.

"He will never find the murderer," she told herself, "because my guardian is the guilty one, and he will not believe it. But he will find out my deed, and then I shall die."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DRIVE IN THE CASCINE.

THERE was a hired carriage at the door of the Pension Belini when Captain Heathcote and his new-found friend arrived. They went upstairs to the drawing-room; in a few moments Edna Heathcote entered. Now at last she was Edna Heathcote. Two days after her husband's death she and her lover had driven to a little church out among the Tuscan hills, and a simple old priest said the few words that the world considers the open sesame to respectability. She had thought that this would make her very happy, that everything would have a brighter, gladder colour. But it made little difference—so little difference either to herself or the man she called husband that she was surprised. She did not brood long over the disappointment; she touched on things lightly—as a bird rests a moment on a house-top and flies away. Like many women, she had no sense of proportion—she could not compare. She did not like to commit a crime, nor break a *Sèvres* cup—each affected her alike. And in her life she had broken a great many *Sèvres* cups, real and figurative.

This afternoon she was pale and worn-looking. Jack Charteris did not notice this. He saw a bright-faced, shallow-eyed little woman, with fluffy curls and an irresolute smile, and he did not think her pleasing. This, of course, was natural enough; for him she stood out from a background of heartlessness, and folly, and sin. It seemed as though the old lawyer was standing beside him repeating in a low monotone the story of her life and of the murder. And yet she did not impress Jack as a woman who had courage; and then, on second thought, it occurred to him that it does not require courage to commit murder—an exalted cowardice rather. He fancied himself something of

a physiognomist, and in her face he saw, or imagined he saw, the history of the crime, written as in a book. Physiognomists deceive themselves now and again, as less pretentious people are apt to do.

Jack turned these loose ends of thought over in his mind in the moment that passed before the introduction. As they went down to the carriage Mrs. Heathcote said brightly,—

“You are not a stranger in this dear Florence of ours?”

“No,” Jack answered; “I used to know Florence well a few years ago, but I have come back to renew the acquaintanceship. I am glad I came. Had I stayed away much longer I should not have known the town.”

“Yes, there are a great many changes,” Mrs. Heathcote said; “and for my part I object to every one of them. I prefer the old Florence—rusty, and uncomfortable, and mediæval; don’t you, Mr. Charteris?”

“I don’t know about that,” Jack said. “You see, I don’t object to comfort; and then, the new shops are more agreeable than the grim, coffin affairs one had to corkscrew oneself into.”

“Oh yes, the shops!” she cried joyously, “some of them are charming; but the better they are,” she added reflectively, “the sadder it is, for one is reminded the more keenly of Paris and London. But now I don’t mind; you know we are going to London?”

Yes, Jack knew; Captain Heathcote had mentioned it. “It must be quite pleasant; for, you know, Florence gets to be a bore unless one cares for saints, and madonnas, and all that.”

They drove through the park, forming part of the procession that jogged along at a funeral trot. The conversation drifted through the usual inanities. Captain Heathcote, sitting bolt upright on the front seat, spoke very little; in Mrs. Heathcote’s presence he usually left the talking to her. Jack tried to lead the conversation up to the subject of Kennedy’s death; it was a topic that any one might have chanced upon.

“I heard to-day about that mysterious affair,” he said, “that Kennedy case. Odd thing, was it not?”

He sat glowering over his moustaches, silent. Mrs.

Heathcote did not speak at once; she changed colour perceptibly; then she turned to Jack with a forced laugh.

"*Ciel!* Mr. Charteris, you are belated!" she cried, in her bright, artificial way; "that is ancient history here. One might as well talk scandal about Queen Elizabeth."

"I'm sorry," Jack said; "but the story rather interested me. Was it suicide?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" Mrs. Heathcote exclaimed, with a pretty gesture of affected terror; "I do not know."

There was nothing to do but to dismiss the subject.

"To be sure, it is not a pleasant affair," Jack said apologetically, "to talk about. Pardon me, Mrs. Heathcote; I'm afraid I have ghoulish tastes."

At that moment a carriage passed them, and in it sat a stiff young man with a long nose and a supercilious lip—the young Prince of Naples. This turned the conversation easily into another channel, and Mrs. Heathcote rattled on jauntily about this notability and that one.

But Jack Charteris had served his purpose. He had marked her embarrassment and saw in it guilt. Perhaps he only read what in imagination he had already written there, but his dislike for her grew, and his certainty of her guilt became more certain—if such a thing could be.

He drove back with them to the Pension Bellini. The usual leave-takings were made, wrapped in tinfoil compliments; an invitation to call was given and accepted; then Jack filled his inevitable pipe and walked rapidly to his hotel. The evening was blue and perfect. The hills, fading away into far indistinctness, still held the reflected sunlight. There were hints of stars in the darkening sky, and a half-moon, shadowy and vague, hung over San Miniato. Perhaps the scene impressed itself on this unromantic young man, but he would have sworn on his honour that he saw no further than the bowl of his pipe. At all events, a wish came to him that he were well out of all this tangle of crime and mystery, among the purple hills somewhere; and he did not picture himself as alone there. Giulietta had a fashion of mixing herself in all his meditations. He found this mental obtrusion decidedly pleasant, and even encouraged it. To such a pass things come when a young man looks into the eyes of a young woman.

This mood lasted until he reached the hotel and found himself in the little drawing-room with his mother and Giulietta. Then a word dispelled it. He knew he should never find happiness—not even among the lonely purple hills—until the riddle of this stranger's death was read aright.

Giulietta was feverish and excited; she had waited hour after hour, fearing she knew not what. Expectant inaction is the worst state of all possible states. Stanley is all right fighting his way through a land of black dwarfs and poisoned arrows; those left behind to linger uselessly have the harder task.

Giulietta came forward eagerly.

"You have news?" she asked.

"Both news and an appetite," Jack said; "as to the news, I have seen Mrs. Heathcote; I have driven with her in the park."

"And you have learned?"

"Nothing at all," Jack answered. "Yes, by the way, she leaves Florence in a few days. At least, that is her intention; but its fulfilment depends upon us, Miss Rombinino; don't you think so?"

"No! no!" she said hastily; "why should we detain her? We shall go away—to-night! to-morrow! Mrs. Charteris, shall we not go? Why should we embroil ourselves in these wretched troubles? Can we not go away and forget them all? I do not wish to know—I do not wish to know!"

A quarter of an hour before this time Jack had been of a similar opinion. Now, with the perverseness that humanity inherited with the taste for apples, he jumped to the opposite pole. Giulietta's sudden reluctance to have the "case" probed was a spur in his side. A sort of dogged purpose gripped him; he determined that he would carry out his first intention: that he would brush aside the mystery that stood like a shadow between him and Giulietta.

"But, you know," he said, "isn't that rather foolish? We have come to Florence for no other reason. Pardon me for recalling it—a few days ago you asked for nothing else in the world. You wished to discover——"

"Yes! yes!" she cried; "but now I wish to discover nothing."

She was all unconscious of the fact—Mrs. Charteris saw it with motherly approval—that Jack Charteris was not an *instrument* to her any more—that he was a man she feared. Perhaps she recognised that she feared him, but she did not know—this is not taught in the convent—that the only man a woman fears is the one she loves. She did not wish him to learn of her connection with the murder, even though that connection was a thing of unreal purpose that had never reached the action point. She carried murder in her heart that night. This he must not know. The hours of that night glided before her—no, he should never know them! She felt that she might tell Mrs. Charteris; that were possible, but——

That was the "but" that comes to every woman.

There is always a man who throws this objectionable conjunction into a woman's life, and troubles the still waters.

There was one thing Giulietta desired above all others—to cover as with a pall all this tumultuous past. Her wish shaped itself almost as Jack's had done: she wanted to go away into the quiet light that lay among the far-away hills.

"Do you remember what you said that day in London?" Jack asked.

"No," she said, in a low voice.

"I promised you that I would find out who was guilty of this crime. You said to me that years after it was all over and done with I should be very glad that I had helped you, that I had worked out the problem."

"Yes, I remember."

They were alone now, for Mrs. Charteris had left the room, and they were standing near each other by the darkening windows.

"You told me that I should know that I had done right and made justice possible," Jack added. "I have not forgotten your words, you see."

"No," she said, "but now—you will do as I ask, will you not? You will not dip any deeper into this black pool of crime and terror?"

"Terror?" Jack asked; "my dear Miss Rombinino, pardon me, but I am sure you are not yourself this evening.

In the morning you will see everything in a different light."

"What shall you do?"

Jack laughed his frank, boyish laugh.

"Dress for dinner. You have not forgotten that I am starving, have you?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPECULATION AND FACT.

THE English journalist, who was not over-burdened with business cares, was drinking a matutinal brandy-and-soda when Jack Charteris looked him up the next morning.

"Ah! dear boy," he said; "have one?"

"Too early," said Jack; "the early b.-and-s. catches the gout."

"You're a lucky dog," the journalist replied, "that you do not need it. We brain-workers——"

"Yes!" Jack said quizzically.

"Must have something of the sort, dear boy. You've got to throw coal under the boilers if you want to get up steam. This, my boy," the journalist added, emptying the glass, "is the first shovelful."

"How many does it take to get a newspaper to press?" Jack asked.

"That depends upon how large the staff is," his friend replied calmly; "but I once made a calculation as to the bottles of brandy it took to write 'Don Juan.' Byron gave me the hint. In one of his letters he says that he wrote half of the fifth canto on one quart. Figure it out for yourself, dear boy!"

"I don't wonder that literature does not pay," Jack admitted; "so much has to go for—coal."

The journalist agreed that literature was a bad business; he thought he should get out of it. As he "wrote" chiefly with the paste-pot and the scissors, an unprejudiced observer might fancy he was "out of it" as it was.

"Will you do me a favour?" Jack asked.

"Delighted," said the *litterateur* dubiously, rattling the keys in his pocket.

"I want to look into this Kennedy business—the curi-

osity of an idle man, you know," Jack continued. "Can you get me permission to look up the police records?"

"I fear not, old boy," his friend answered; "but we'll go over and see the bobby who has the affair in charge, if you wish."

"Certainly," said Jack.

"I can do that much—I know the chief. He is a shrewd, steel-trap sort of a fellow, but good-natured enough."

They called at the police-station, and were shown into a private room, opening from a corridor that led to the "chief's" office. In a few moments the man they wished to see entered. He was a young man, foxy-faced, suave, agreeable. He shook hands with the journalist, and bowed to Jack Charteris.

"A friend of mine—Mr. Charteris. He wished to see the records of this 'Kennedy case.' Can you assist us? I shall consider the favour personal."

"And your reason?" the policeman said, looking at Jack with keen, watchful eyes.

"I wish to know what has been done," Charteris replied, "and——"

"You are a relative?"

"No."

"At least, a friend?"

"No, I never saw the man," Jack added; he had taken an instinctive dislike, of the Dr. Fell sort, for this man. He finished abruptly, "I have no especial reason."

The police-officer threw out his hands in a deprecatory way and smiled confidentially on the journalist.

"Impossible," he said, "it is against our rules. I am deeply grieved, but if your friend, Mr. Charteris, had any——"

"Never mind," said Jack; "much obliged."

He went out, and his friend followed.

"Too brusque, dear boy; never gain anything by it."

"I don't like the chap," Jack returned; "and my fancy was idiotic, you know. I shan't trouble about the affair."

"Come to the club with me?"

"No, thank you; I'm off for a stroll," Jack said. "I shall see you to-morrow, probably."

He was in the Via Tornabuoni when his friend left him;

a few paces ahead he saw a *carabiniere*. He overtook him, and asked to be directed to the house where "the Englishman" had been murdered. The policeman was a fat, short little man of fifty, with sleepy eyes, and a perfectly round face.

"You know the place?"

"Yes, signore; I will show it to you."

They walked on together.

"Were you concerned in the investigation?" Jack asked.

"Yes, signore, and no."

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps you were a friend of the man who was killed?"

"Yes," Jack replied, "a friend."

"Very well; I cannot talk to you now, but in an hour I shall be free. If you wish to meet me, I shall be glad to tell you everything I know about the affair."

"You shall not lose by it," Jack assured him; "where shall I find you?"

The policeman named a little wine-shop in the neighbourhood.

"You will ask for Giosue Trinci," he added.

"I shall not forget," Jack answered; "in an hour."

Giosue Trinci drew up his pompous little body, touched his cocked hat, and gravely walked on.

When Jack Charteris reached the wine-shop the policeman had not yet appeared. Jack took a seat at one of the tables, and ordered a glass of wine. At one table a few men were playing cards; in the corner half a dozen women were squabbling and drinking wine, while their children played about on the brick floor; from the kitchen came an odour of garlicky soup.

It was not a pleasant spot for a *rendezvous*, and the young man waited impatiently. It was a few minutes past the appointed time when Trinci came in. He spoke first to the wine-shop keeper; then he approached Jack.

"There is a room upstairs, where we can talk," he said; "shall we go up?"

"Certainly," Jack replied; "lead the way. And you might tell the landlord to send up a bottle of wine."

The room was small and low-ceilinged; two large windows looked out on the street; the furniture consisted of a table

and a few chairs. When the wine had been brought, and they were sitting facing each other, Jack broke silence.

"What do you know of this affair?" he asked abruptly.

"All that is known," said Trinci, blinking his lazy eyes, "I know."

"That sounds encouraging—if there is anything known."

"Very little," Trinci replied; "I was taken off the case before I had time to unearth all the facts. And now one preliminary thing, then I will tell you what I discovered. I do not ask for money, but if the guilty one is arrested, or even brought to light, by your exertions and mine, you will promise that I receive the credit that is my due?"

"Certainly," Jack said heartily; "all the credit, if you will. I am not competing for detective honours. Now tell your story."

Trinci, leaning forward, with his elbows on the table and blinking sleepily, described the scene of the murder; the appearance of the body; rehearsed the conversation he had with the people of the house; described the inquest.

"Good," said Jack; "and then?"

"Ah, and then!" echoed Trinci. "These facts are clear: at nine o'clock this man went to his room; the next morning he was found dead; at what hour death took place is uncertain, probably at twelve o'clock—not later, at all events."

"And the people in the house?"

"They are not to be suspected. I have inquired closely; I am sure that they had nothing to do with the murder."

"How could one get entrance to his rooms?"

"In the lower hall are two doors; the outer one of oak, the inner one of grated iron. At eleven o'clock these are locked, but any one who lives in the house has a key that opens them. The halls are not lighted at night, and there are plenty of places for concealment."

"I understand; go on!"

"The door leading to the apartments where Kennedy lodged is only locked late at night. So you see that there is no trouble in any one entering the house and even entering the apartments. Now, as to the room where the murder was committed. The door was locked, but the windows opened on a *loggia*. You see, it was as easy to

kill the man in that room as though he were lying in the Piazza Signorina."

"Yes."

"Why was he killed?" Trinci asked, with a sudden flash in his dull eyes. "He was not robbed. No; then he was killed for vengeance. It is perfectly natural. He was a fine and proper man; he had made preparations to go away; and then the woman he had wronged stabbed him."

"Who was she?" Jack asked.

"Who was the woman?" Trinci replied; "that I cannot say; you shall see for yourself. I can trust you?"

"To be sure," said Jack; "it is more to me than it is to you."

"I said to myself," Trinci continued, "that the woman who did this was an Italian. My countrywomen, you know, signore, do not permit men to play them false—they stab them. And, moreover, it was an Italian knife that gave the blow; I have seen many such; I am certain."

"A mere supposition," said Jack, who began to feel that he was wasting his time.

"Quite right, signore, a mere supposition," Trinci answered imperturbably, "and one that I cannot give weight to. But I made inquiries; I sought out his acquaintances. He had very few. There were business men and men of pleasure with whom he was intimate; no women. This seemed to overthrow my theory? On the contrary, signore, it strengthened it. Where there are not many women, there is one woman, our proverb says, and then there is danger."

"You are a sensible man, I believe," Jack said; "you have something to say, have you not?"

"A moment, signore," said his companion; "if your interest in this murder is as great as you have led me to believe, you will not regret the time you are spending with me."

Jack resigned himself, drank wine, and smoked his pipe.

"I said to myself," Giosue Trinci went on, sleepily impressive, "there is then one woman. I learned that this man—so regular, so methodical—had been away from home the whole night preceding the one during which he was murdered. Where was he? I will tell you."

Jack roused himself, for Trinci had straightened himself up and spoke with assurance.

"The two days—on each of the two days before the fatal night he visited a woman."

"Yes, yes," Jack cried impatiently; "I know that."

"Then I have nothing to tell you, signore," said Giosue Trinci, with a touch of bitterness; "you are as wise as I am. You know that the woman was young and beautiful, and that since the murder she has not been seen, and yet her friends do not——"

"I know all that," said Jack, pushing two sovereigns across the table and rising; "and, my good fellow, you have made a big blunder—or, rather, a small blunder, I should say. But you have got the facts well in order, and I shall remember my promise."

Giosue Trinci put on his cocked hat and went out gloomily. Italians never trust each other, but they are usually ready enough to trust an Englishman. In this case Trinci regretted his precipitate confidence. Another dream-palace tumbled down about his ears.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOT PLOUGHSHARES.

JACK CHARTERIS felt that he had wasted his time chatting with the fat policeman. To be sure, he had got a clearer notion of the environment of the crime, and Giosue Trinci's blundering suspicion had strengthened his own better-grounded belief. There was a woman, to be sure; she lived in the house that Kennedy visited on those two occasions; but the policeman, Jack felt certain, had mistaken her identity. Every fact that came to him seemed to be one more link in the chain of evidence that he was drawing round Edna Heathcote.

And she puzzled him; that he admitted. When she first fluttered into the drawing-room of the Pension Bellini, all silk and lace, and dimples and smiles, he set her down as both frivolous and shallow. That she was frivolous one could not doubt; more than this, she had a great deal more than woman's usual share of foolishness. But, in addition, she had an inborn shrewdness—a sort of animal cunning—that perplexed him. The duplicity of a shallow woman is always the hardest to deal with.

On her part Edna Heathcote disliked Jack Charteris; she had not been with him half an hour before she was instinctively "on guard." She was not surprised when he spoke of Berwyn Kennedy, she told herself afterwards; she expected it. But her sudden pallor had betrayed her agitation—of this she was sure. So much the better reason for being "on guard," she repeated to herself.

Beyond doubt Jack had noticed her agitation, and in it he read guilt. As a matter of fact, this is one of those signs that can be read in different ways. Another person might have taken it as an indication of innocence. He would have reasoned that a guilty person is always on the

alert, always thinking of the crime, always expecting it to appear in full light; it is only when the crime is not the topic under consideration that the guilty one is restless, suspicious, ill at ease.

Be this as it may, Jack Charteris took prompt advantage of his permission to call. Only twenty-four hours had elapsed since he had seen her when he presented himself at the Pension Bellini. He had laid his plans; he did not fear their success. He was quite determined that this butterfly fiend, with the cooing voice and the bright eyes, should be brought to confess her crime, or her share in the crime, that had undone Berwyn Kennedy. It had occurred to him that she had not done the deed alone; it might be that she had only inspired it. While he recognised this as a probability, Jack had not for a moment suspected Captain Heathcote of having had any hand in the bad business. Why? He could not say. Except that everything in Captain Heathcote's manner and bearing was enough to give the lie to such a supposition.

Women do desperate deeds when their reputations are at stake. Edna Heathcote's reputation hung by a thread while Berwyn Kennedy lived. These speculations flitted through Jack's head as he strolled toward the Lungarno. When he reached the Pension Bellini and sent up his card, he felt in excellent form to open the attack.

"Signora Heathcote was at home," the servant said, "and would receive him in her drawing-room."

Jack turned over the books on the table while waiting. She did not keep him long. Only five minutes had elapsed when she fluttered into the room. She was dressed in a gown of some sort of soft white stuff, and her face was rouged.

"What a delightful surprise, Mr. Charteris!" she murmured, coming forward; "it is charming of you to have come to see me, and you could not have chosen a more opportune moment. It happens that I am alone; and I assure you, Mr. Charteris, I have been half bored to death."

"I am indeed fortunate," Jack answered, taking her hand and holding it as short a time as possible; "especially since I called to see you on a matter of—I don't know whether

I can call it a matter of business," he added, with slight confusion, "but at all events it is a matter of importance."

"You surprise me," she said languidly, "we such new—shall I say friends?"

She sank into a chair, and Jack seated himself near her.

"Very new friends," he said; "but, you know, I know one or two people with whom you are acquainted, and that makes all the difference in the world; does it not?"

"To be sure it does, Mr. Charteris," she laughed gaily; "you are quite right. But the business! Let me hear about it. The friends can wait, can they not?"

She took up a fan from the table and opened it. Jack noticed that her hands fluttered nervously.

"Well, you know," he went on, easily and naturally, "I thought perhaps you'd be kind enough to tell me what you know about this man who was killed—Berwyn Kennedy?"

She was prepared for the question; she had been perfectly sure it was coming.

"What an extraordinary request, Mr. Charteris!" she cried, in an amazement too intense to be real; "how in the world should I know anything of him? He was an acquaintance, to be sure. But so are you, and many other people."

"But his case is exceptional, Mrs. Heathcote," Jack replied impassively.

"I know nothing about him," she said, in a slightly sharper tone of voice, and she closed the fan with a snap.

"That is very odd," Jack went on calmly, "when one thinks how closely related to you he was."

She opened the fan again, and moved it nervously to and fro; the rouge on her face only emphasized the pallor that crept beneath it.

"Who told you this?" she asked.

"Mr. David Davidson, a lawyer of Stirling. I saw him a few days ago."

She stood up, and the fan fell broken from her fingers. Jack rose too. They looked at each other, and neither spoke. It seemed as though in that moment all the youth had faded from her face, leaving it old, and worn, and haggard. Deep lines shadowed themselves between her brows, crept about the corners of her mouth and eyes.

"Who are you?" she said at last, in a strained voice. "Why have you come here? What do you want? Speak to me, for God's sake, man! Say what you have to say. I——"

"Why did you kill him?" Jack asked calmly.

"Kill him? Kill Berwyn Kennedy?" She looked at him in a dazed way for a moment; then an amused light crept into her eyes; she threw herself back in the chair and laughed aloud.

There was nothing forced or affected about her now: the laughter was genuine; it had the ring of amusement, of relief.

It occurred to Jack that he probably looked ridiculous standing up there; he sat down. He had a suspicion that his well-laid plans were going to follow the old fashion and "gang agley." He wondered what the deuce he was to make of this. Here was a woman who was laughing like a mountebank because she had killed a man, and been found out.

Jack decided that she had lost her mind; the explanation seemed very reasonable.

"I say, you know," he remarked at last, "it's bad enough to kill a man, without laughing over it."

His voice seemed to recall her to herself; she looked up at him; the evident relief in her face disconcerted him. But he had arranged his questions, and went on calmly.

"Why did you do it?"

"But I did not do it," she answered, with equal calmness.

"You wrote Mr. Davidson that you believed him dead. At that time he was alive; a day later he was murdered."

"You saw that letter?" she asked hastily.

"Yes; I read that letter, and I know all the circumstances connected with Berwyn Kennedy's life. How was it that you made that remark? It read like a prophecy."

"I will tell you," she interposed, brushing back her short dark curls. "I—I had to answer the letter—I was obliged to answer it, you know; was I not?"

"But why did you say he was dead?" Jack persisted.

"I do not know," she murmured; "I said what came to me—I did not think."

"Are you aware that all the evidence points to you?"

This time she answered sharply, and her eyes burned angrily.

"Do you still persist in that foolish charge? I could easily enough disprove it. I was at the opera; after that at a ball; then—— But I shall make no explanation to you. And now I am ready to talk of that business. I think I understand what it is. You are prouder of your profession of blackmailer than your confederates are. They hide and snarl; you, I see, are bold enough to come forward and talk business. Now talk!"

"In God's name! what do you mean?" Jack exclaimed, and again he thought that perhaps after all she was mad.

"No!" she cried impetuously; "I will not talk with you! I will not hear you! Go—if you dare go—to Captain Heathcote and talk your business! My God! how low men can fall! I suppose you were a gentleman once!"

She stood up, looking at him with blazing scorn; then she drew a packet of letters from the bosom of her gown, and flung them at his feet.

"Here!" she said, "take these back to your masters!"

Mechanically Jack picked them up.

"But, Mrs. Heathcote——"

She pointed to the door.

"Go," she said.

"But——"

She swept past him and pulled the bell-cord. Tito Ciuti appeared.

"Show this gentleman out, Tito; and in future I am not at home."

The old servant handed him his hat and gloves, and in a dazed fashion Jack found his way to the street.

It was not till then that he noticed that he had in his hand a packet of letters.

CHAPTER XX.

LETTERS AND JOURNALISM.

It was early evening, but already dark, when Jack found himself unexpectedly thrust out of the Pension Bellini. For a moment he stood and looked about him, as though he expected those unsavoury "confederates" of whom Mrs. Heathcote had spoken to come out of the darkness and tap him on the shoulder. Then he turned over the letters in his hand.

"Heaven save me from a papilionaceous fury gone mad!" he muttered at last, with a grim smile, and set off with long strides. If Edna Heathcote had been a riddle before, now she was an enigma of large proportions. "If she did not kill Kennedy," Jack thought, "by Jove! she could have done it."

The lights of a *café* attracted him, and he turned in, and called for a *café-cognac*.

"And now," he remarked to himself, "I will see what message I have to take to my confederates."

He opened the packet. There were three letters. They were written in a florid Italian hand on thin blue paper, and were undated and unsigned. Jack read the shorter one first. It ran:—

"Will Madame Heathcote grant an interview to one who wishes her well, and has it in his power to do her an inestimable favour? A reply sent to M., The General Post Office, will be immediately received."

"Well," said Jack to himself, "this confederate of mine seems to be an anonymous blackguard."

He folded up the letter, and read the next.

It was couched in these words:—

"It is deeply to be regretted that Madame Heathcote did not see fit to answer the communication sent to her yesterday. It was dictated by a kindly spirit. Madame Heathcote is wise enough to know that kindness despised assumes a harsher aspect. It may be suggested that under the present very peculiar circumstances Madame Heathcote would have acted with more wisdom if she had granted the interview asked for. Perhaps she has already reconsidered her unfortunate determination.

"Madame Heathcote has become heiress to an ample fortune; but when the very peculiar circumstances are taken into consideration, she may feel that it would be but just to share it with one who has it in his power to render her an inestimable favour. Madame Heathcote may make an appointment by writing to M., The General Post Office."

Jack read this letter twice.

"And this confederate of mine," he thought, "is an infernal scoundrel. I'm getting into bad company, decidedly."

The third and last letter read :—

"Madame Heathcote,—

"You have a foolish way of treating those who wish to serve you. Now I shall write frankly to you. I know the circumstances of your whole life. I know the double motive you had for killing your husband, and I know under what circumstances you killed him. I know that you have inherited the fortune that should have been his, and that you have gained a respectable position—no matter how insecure it is—by marrying the man with whom you have lived in sin. You will observe, Madame Heathcote, that my knowledge is complete; permit me to assure you that it is minute. The value of your inheritance is £30,000. Within two months you will pay to a messenger whom I will send to you, duly accredited, the sum of £20,000. This—and this alone—can save you from the deplorable effects of the exposure that it is in my power to make.

"Permit me to add, Madame Heathcote, that I who write this am merely the instrument. Behind me is a power

that has never known failure and that never accepts defeat. You may journey where you will, but you will always feel its presence. Do not imagine that your memory of this demand shall be allowed to sleep. As I said, I am actuated by kindly motives. And I advise you to take what steps are necessary for making the payment of £20,000 upon the day named.

"There will be no time of grace. To this letter there is no answer. It is too late to make terms; you can only submit or accept the consequences. These, I doubt not, your good sense will show you in all their seriousness.

"Act in time!"

Jack folded up the letters, and put them in his pocket.

"So Mrs. Heathcote," he thought, "does me the honour of supposing that I am making the running for these d——d blackguards. Pleasant, that! She must have supposed that, or she would never have given me these letters. She could hardly think anything else after I had accused her of the murder. What the deuce did she mean by laughing? And she's got an *alibi*. That looks bad—it shows preparation. And that last letter. But the letters go for nothing. The man who writes an anonymous letter is always a liar. Wonder what he meant by the "power"? Gammon, probably."

The result of all Jack's thinking went no further than this—his certainty of Edna Heathcote's direct guilt was shaken, but he still believed that she was concerned in the murder in some way.

"By Jove!" he concluded, as a haphazard fancy touched him; "she might have hired one of these blackguards, and bilked them of their pay. Now they are going to have it, with interest."

This did not seem unreasonable; but her coolness? Bah! it was a tangle of cross-threads. He was tired of turning it over and over and pulling at the loose ends.

He handed the waiter a *lira* and went out, and, as luck would have it, ran against his friend the journalist. It was evident that the *litterateur* had been "shovelling in coal," as he would have said, all day. He shook hands with Jack with as much effusive affection as though the

said Jack had been his long-lost brother come home in a quick consumption and with a fortune.

"Dear f'ler," he said; "ah, Charteris, how are you, eh? how d'y' do?" Then he went on volubly: "Been working like a galley-slave chained to a pen: wrote three columns; words that burn and—how d's it go?—adjectives that scorch! We go to press to-morrow. But, stay, old boy; I've got the proofs here. Come with me, Charteris, an' I'll read y' the article—I like you, y' know, an,' by Gad! I'll do it!"

"Thanks awfully," said Jack; "but I shouldn't think of troubling you. I'll wait till the paper is out."

"No trouble, dear boy, no trouble! By Gad! Jack Charteris, I'll do it for you, for I like you, y' see. Three columns of words that burn—all scorchers!"

Jack was still protesting, when the journalist drew him aside and whispered with husky impressiveness: "To-morrow Florence will be blanched with livid terror, the hair of Florence will stand on end—each individual hair, like the quill of a fretful porpentine; the cover will be lifted off the black pit that seethes and hisses under this city, and sends its deadly poison into all the veins of the ramifications of society."

Jack understood that these were fragmentary phrases of the three-column article, which the journalist was quoting haphazard.

"I shall be glad to read it," he said, making an effort to get away.

"Of course you will," his friend replied; "it's a revelation. D'ye ever hear of the *Mafia*?"

"Those chaps in America who are shooting all the Americans who have not shot each other? Yes; heard of them."

"And do you know that there are as many of them in Italy as there are fleas? Course you don't, Charteris. Wait till you've read my article. Journalistic enterprise. I'll read it to you, I will by——"

"Never mind, old chap," Jack answered; "walk on a bit and stretch your legs, and tell us about it."

With great dignity the journalist refused the proffered arm, and marched with uncertain deliberation at Jack's side.

"Jack Charteris, I like you, y' see. To-morrow Florence will stand on end—the hair, I mean; and, old f'ler, I've been working like a galley-slave chained to a pen. I've found 'em out. There's new journalism for you! Hired a chap to find out another chap to bribe, and bribed the other chap. I tell you, Jack Charteris, there is a society—that isn't the word—there is an association that is sending its poison through all the ramifications of society. What is this association, our readers may ask? We reply that it is the *Mafia*. And I tell you, Jack Charteris, that I can prove it. I like you, dear boy, an' I'll do it. Do it? What are they doing? Murdering men, robbing, blackmailing women!"

"Hulloa!" thought Jack.

He began to question his friend. A little good-nature and a great deal of persistence elicited the fact that the journalist had written a three-column denunciation of the *Mafia*; that he had charged it with committing many of the "mysterious crimes" of Florence; that he had a "confession" from one who had attended the meetings; and that these were held in a *trattoria* in the Val d'Ema.

"Is there any truth in all this?" Jack asked.

His friend drew himself up with offended dignity; then he took Jack familiarly by the arm.

"Dear boy," he said, "I will give you a journalistic maxim—never tell a lie that can be disproved. That is the art of successful journalism."

"Thanks," said Jack; "and how much truth is there in this article of yours?"

"One column," said the journalist promptly; "the rest is imagination—expanded truth, so to speak. But I had my facts all right, dear boy. I paid for them. Bless you, every beggar in the street knows of the *Mafia*. I found out where they do congregate. There's the article. Charteris, I'll read it to you; by Gad! I will, Jack Charteris, for I like you, y' know."

"Then such an association exists?"

"Of course. By the way, dear boy, you were talking about that fellow Kennedy?"

"Yes," Jack said eagerly.

"I used him as an illustration—point a moral and adorn

a tale, 'y' know—mysterious murder—*Mafia*—ramifications of society. There's imagination for you! eh, old boy? I'll read it to you. Come to the club."

It occurred to Jack Charteris that there might be more truth than imagination in the suggestion, and he wondered whether he was on the track of his "blackguard confederates." By the time they had reached the club he had extracted from his friend a tolerably accurate description of the *trattoria* in the Val d'Ema; it was at Galuzzo, he ascertained.

"Come up, Jack Charteris," his friend said, as they stood at the door; "there's plenty of coal."

"I must be off," Jack replied.

"Nonsense, old f'ler; one shovelful!"

"No, thank you."

"But I will read you my article. I will, Jack Charteris; I mean it, for I like you."

But by this time the object of all this affection was out of sight in the darkness, and the journalist—by the time he had reached the smoking-room—had forgotten his dear friend's existence.

In the Piazza Ponte alla Carraja Jack hailed a *fiacre*.

"Galuzzo," he said, as he took his seat.

"Galuzzo, Excellency?"

"Yes; is your horse fresh?"

"One hour out of the stable, Excellency, and quick on his legs as a kitten."

"Good! Drive on," Jack said; and then added as an after-thought, "Save him a bit going out. If you serve me well to-night, you'll go home with fifty *lire* in your pocket."

This sudden journey was altogether the result of impulse, but on consideration Jack was sure that he was acting wisely. If there were such an organization—and he had heard of it often—he might bring something to light. He might learn something of the "Kennedy case," or something of the blackguard "confederates" with whom Mrs. Heathcote had endowed him. If not, he could have a bit of supper in a country inn, and drive home none the worse. That there was an element of danger in the trip he recognised clearly enough. But, although he was not armed, he felt

that he could take care of himself. The danger was only an additional spur to one of his temperament.

The carriage rolled gently down the slope of a long hill; to the left was a little church, set back on a terrace that faced the highway; a few yards in front a jagged line of buildings rose against the black sky.

"This is Galuzzo, Excellency," said the driver.

Jack peered out into the darkness; at the foot of the road he saw a red, swinging lantern, the usual sign of a roadside inn among these Tuscan hills.

"Wait here," he said to the driver; "pull up alongside the church and wait."

"Yes, Excellency."

"And keep your hand on the reins," Jack added; "be ready to start at a moment's notice."

"Excellency knows this place?"

"Do *you*?" Jack returned sharply.

The driver shrugged his expressive shoulders.

"Well enough, Excellency, not to wish to go there to-night."

"Wait here," Jack replied, as he walked away, "and be ready."

As he passed it he glanced up at the little church, with its plump tower and smug, stuccoed face; then he hurried on to the doorway of the inn, where the red lantern swung, scattering a smoky light through the lurid panes of glass. He made his way through a courtyard, paved with uneven stones, towards a door whence the light streamed out. Beyond there was a room, with a fireplace, and a rude dresser dotted with wine-flasks, and a few tables. Near the fire a few peasants sat drinking and smoking; they looked up as he entered, and one of them growled out a gruff "*Buon' sera!*"

"Good-evening!" Jack returned. He took a seat at one of the tables, and rapped lustily with his walking-stick. A moment later a stalwart, square-shouldered woman of fifty appeared. Her face was marked with hard lines, and her eyes were defiant and bright, like steel mirrors. She looked at Jack with a quiet stare that was so impertinent that it might have been acquired in a Belgravian drawing-room.

"What have you to eat?" he asked; "a bit of fowl, or veal, or——"

"A young fowl, Excellency."

"Good," said Jack, "that will do—and wine."

She looked at him a moment; one would have said that there was a question on the tip of her tongue. Then she turned away and marched—like a grenadier—towards the kitchen.

Jack smoked his pipe and waited.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE INN AT GALUZZO.

It is always the man's way: he rustles through noisy events of life, and finds little time for brooding. And this is always the woman's way: she sits in dusk rooms, and waits.

While Jack Charteris was keen on the scent, stumbling through the unexpected to the "kill," Giulietta was alone with her thoughts, and fears, and fancies. Over her a storm-cloud brooded, and any moment, she felt, the sudden lightning might dart down like a lance. And if that happened—if the lightning fell—she knew that, for her, all hope of happiness was dead.

During the time that they had been in Florence she and Mrs. Charteris had remained quietly in the little hotel in the Via Montebello. Jack had said—and what Jack said had an authoritative ring to it—that it was better that no one should know of her presence in Florence.

"And especially Montecinqe," he had added.

Giulietta had followed Jack's advice with feminine fidelity, and yet—well, an hour after Giulietta's arrival in Florence Montecinqe knew all about it. It were useless to speculate as to the source of his information. It was the business of Montecinqe to know the business of other people, and—as one says in the city—he was an excellent business man. Then, again, he had an admirable fashion of not letting his right hand know what his left hand was doing. This is an excellent precept to keep in mind if one wishes to succeed—as Montecinqe succeeded. He knew where Giulietta was; he commended her prudence in living a retired life until, as he phrased it, her nerves were settled.

But the time came at last when he wished to see her.

She had played to perfection, he supposed, the part assigned her, and he felt a sort of kindness for her—the kindness one feels for a horse that has run well.

About four o'clock in the afternoon he called at the little hotel where Giulietta was, and sent up his card. The servant brought back word that Signorina Rombinino was engaged, and begged to be excused.

Montecinqe smiled and went away. A few hours later he called again, and, as he had expected, found that Giulietta had reconsidered her position. This time she received him.

"Buona sera, mia cara!" he said airily, lifting her hand and kissing it gallantly.

"You wished to see me?" she asked abruptly.

"Beyond doubt," he replied, "since I come the second time. Permit me to express my pleasure that the engagements of Signorina Rombinino at last give her leisure to receive me."

He drew up a chair, laughing pleasantly.

"I regret that I could not see you this afternoon. There are affairs—dull, necessary affairs, my dear—that we must talk over in private. There are facts, *mia cara*, concerning this dead and excellent man Kennedy that your friends and mine—— You have not forgotten the occasion of our meeting? No. Well, these friends wish to hear your account. A few of them thought of coming to see you here."

"My God!" she cried; "that——"

"That would be unpleasant, to be sure," he went on agreeably, "and perhaps compromising. I am quite of your opinion. I assured them the project was most unwise, and I assured them that you would doubtless come to-night to a small meeting, where the story can be told comfortably and quietly."

"I shall not go," Giulietta said. "I have nothing to say to you or to your friends."

"It is quite as you prefer," he replied suavely; "my friends are quite willing to come here. But I think you will come. Disloyalty is a sin that my friends do not forgive."

Giulietta turned the question over in her mind and made a sudden decision: she would go. At any moment Mrs. Charteris might come in—Jack might return; she could

not receive those "friends" here, and it was clear that the only other alternative was to accompany Montecinqe.

"Be it as you say," she said abruptly, and left the room to make ready. Her guardian smiled, and strolled about the room, waiting. In a few minutes she returned, and they left the house. Half an hour later—as on that other memorable night—she was driving with him through the Porta Romana and up the long steep hill toward Galuzzo. She did not speak. Oddly enough, Montecinqe left her to herself. He lolled back in a corner of the carriage and puffed a cigarette, gazing lazily through the open window. One would have said that he was admiring the young stars that glittered along the edges of the purple hills. And, as before, the carriage rolled under the archway into the dark courtyard. Giulietta recognised it all—the flaring torch, the noisy mill clattering close by, the door and the staircase that led to the room above. She mounted the stairs hastily, without waiting for Montecinqe's assistance. The room was unchanged: it might have been the same fire that glowered on the hearth; the same candles threw flickering lights on the walls. There were a score of men present; to her mind they seemed shadows, dark and unreal. They drew back as she entered, and she was left standing alone.

"The Signorina Rombinino, our sister," said Montecinqe, "has come to tell us the story of the death of a man who deserved to die. She has done a brave deed; she has avenged her brother; she has kept her oath. Speak, signorina! Tell us the story of your revenge—tell us how you killed him!"

"Killed him!" she cried; "I did not kill him! You know it. I could not kill him; I fled!"

Montecinqe smiled indulgently.

"That is all very well, *mia cara*; but now you are among friends and brothers speak truly."

"I did not kill him," she repeated doggedly; "I went away."

"You did not?" he said, for her earnestness rang true.

"No," she replied, throwing back her head and drawing up her slender figure to its full height; "I know nothing of it, as you know."

"What foolish lie is this?" Montecinque cried; "*cor' di Dio!* what liars women are!"

One of the shadows came forward into the circle of light, a man with the shifty eyes and pallid face of the convict.

"If the signorina remembers the letter," he said, in his husky voice, "she will no longer deny."

"To be sure, the letter," Montecinque exclaimed. He drew a slip of paper from his pocket-book, and, holding it before her, threw the light of a candle full upon it.

"Will you read, my dear ward?" he asked.

She started as though he had struck her, and then, with a low, helpless cry, covered her face with her hands.

"No?" he said pleasantly; "then permit me."

"You must be right," he read. "I will keep my oath: I will kill Berwyn Kennedy to-night. Pray God that I may die."

"GIULIETTA."

"This is your letter, dear child," he continued, "is it not?"

Giulietta did not answer; she looked about her like a frightened animal seeking a way of escape. Then suddenly, without thought, with only a blind desire to escape from these shadows, she rushed to the door. It was not locked; she threw it open and darted down the stairs into the courtyard. Quick and unexpected as her flight was, Montecinque was not a moment behind her. The outer doors of the courtyard were closed, and she pulled furiously at the heavy iron bar. Montecinque laid his hand on her arm and laughed.

"My dear ward," he began; "you are——"

At that moment Montecinque received a clean and scientific blow under the chin that sent him to the floor ten feet away. He went down with a groan and did not speak.

"Permit me to open this door," Jack Charteris said calmly. He wrenched aside the heavy bar and hastily opened the door. "Come," he said, and putting his arm about her waist he drew her out into the dark street. There was a trampling of feet, a sound of excited voices behind them. Giulietta faltered and would have fallen, but

Jack picked her up in his arms and ran on. His carriage was waiting, and he laid her gently on the seat.

"To Florence!" he cried; "and drive as though the devil was after you!"

"*Feddidio!*" muttered the coachman, as he laid his whip on the horse; "that is not improbable!"

CHAPTER XXII.

RESCUE AND SUSPICION.

PUFFING at his pipe and sipping the red wine to which he had helped himself, Jack Charteris sat in the dingy public room of the *trattoria*. He had no expectation that anything was going to happen. He had driven out to Galuzzo for the purpose of finding out, if possible, whether the little inn was the *rendezvous* of his blackguard "confederates," as Mrs. Heathcote would have said. Being a determined young man, he resolved to stay there until he had picked up enough information to pay him for his trouble, at least.

"Everything cometh to him who waits," he reflected tritely, "and I shall wait."

He leaned back on the wooden bench and waited.

The grenadier-like woman brought him a fowl, a roll of white Italian bread, and a plate of figs. Jack tried to draw her into conversation; she answered in monosyllables. He tasted the roast fowl; it was underdone, and he pushed the dish aside and gave himself up to his pipe and wine. Through the open door he could see the courtyard, half lit by the smoky torch. At last he saw three dark figures cross the courtyard, and then he heard their footsteps clattering up the stone stairs.

"Well," he muttered, "if there is to be a performance this is a tame beginning."

Then other figures, by twos and threes, came from the darkness into the area of light and disappeared; their voices he could hear and the sound of their footsteps. Here and there he caught a glimpse of a face; there was one that he fancied he had seen before, where he could not remember. The woman of the *trattoria* came into the room; she glanced at the untasted supper.

"The signore is not pleased with the fowl?" she asked harshly.

"No," returned Jack; "it is badly killed, badly cooked, badly served."

His whole attention was concentrated on the narrow lane of light that led from the doorway into the misty courtyard. He heard a carriage drive up, but it stopped in the shadow, and he could not see it. He heard voices, and again footsteps echoed on the stone flags and up the noisy stairs. The tread of men and then, light but distinct, "the sound of feet and little feet." He pushed aside the table and walked rapidly toward the door. The woman of the *trattoria* was before him. She closed the door suddenly, and then turned her impassive corrugated face on Jack.

"It is cold," she observed composedly; "the wind blows down from the hills to-night."

The peasants drinking by the fireplace laughed.

"Your guests have a fireplace upstairs, I hope," Jack answered; "you are quite right, it is cold. But your manners are a trifle brusque, my good woman; they lack polish."

He went back to the table, poured out a glass of wine and drank it slowly. Then he put his pipe in the case and drew out his purse.

"How much?" he asked curtly.

She pretended to make an elaborate calculation, and then said boldly, "Five *lire*, signore."

Jack threw the money on the table. The woman stood in front of the door and made no movement to let him pass.

"The signore goes?" she asked.

"The signore goes," Jack observed calmly; "and the signora stands aside while he opens the door."

She looked at him, and after a moment's hesitation stepped aside. Jack threw open the door and went out. The door was closed behind him. He stood still for a moment, until his eyes grew accustomed to the wavering lights and shadows; and as he stood, there came again the "sound of feet and little feet," hurried now, and swift, and a slight figure fled across the court to the outer door. He saw the small white hands tugging desperately at the cross-bar, and then——

Jack's heart stopped beating for a moment. He knew that voice—that sobbing, low cry of despair.

He was not quite sure what happened after that. He remembered dealing some one a blow—straight from the shoulder, and well sent home—and then, somehow or other, Giulietta was in his arms.

And now he was sitting beside her; the stout little Tuscan horse was galloping away toward Florence. Far down in the valley he could see the lights strung like yellow beads along the Arno-side. Overhead the half-moon hung luminous and low. He leaned far out of the window and looked back. There was nothing to be seen; a turn of the road hid the village from sight. Then he sank back in the cushions beside her. For a time neither spoke. Giulietta wrapped her cloak close about her; she tried to still the beating of her heart—she knew he must hear it. She was faint with dread, and fear, and love—the love that does not cast out fear, but sharpens it.

Jack spoke first.

"I was a trifle unceremonious, Miss Rombinino," he said; "pardon me."

"You were kind—and brave," she murmured.

"Not at all," he went on. "I simply knocked that chap down, whoever he was. Of course, I do not wish to be impertinent, but don't you think this was a rather strange place for us to meet?"

Jack Charteris was not in an especially pleasant frame of mind. He was angry and sick at heart, and a terrible suspicion haunted him. Oddly enough, he gave it shape by wondering whether he had not done Mrs. Heathcote an injustice. He tried to bury this suspicion deep; but it cried up to him like the ghost of Elsinore. He tried to cover it over with his love, but it would not be hid, and its voice would not be stilled.

She did not answer his remark. He waited, tortured with his love and doubt.

"Why were you there?" he asked at last abruptly, almost brutally.

She tried to reply, but her lips refused to shape the words she wished to say.

"Who was that man?" he said.

"My guardian," she said, with an effort; but now that she had found her voice she felt stronger, more assured.

"Montecinque!" Jack said, laughing bitterly. "He will not look pretty to-morrow. I am not in the habit of knocking men down, but I think that was done effectively. Tell me," he went on, with a sudden change of manner, "what you were doing in that place—with him—with this man, who is a murderer, as you have told me? There—among those cut-throats and blackguard confederates?"

That last phrase slipped from his tongue involuntarily, but he never found reason to correct it.

"I went with my guardian. He ordered me to go; it was right that I should obey him," Giulietta answered slowly.

"Forgive me," Jack said firmly, and very sadly; "but that is an evasion that is unworthy of you. I have a right to ask you these questions, and to demand an answer—a full, true answer. Forgive me for reminding you that I have come to Florence to accomplish a task that you have set me. Have I not the right to demand your assistance? And you are hiding from me everything of importance, and tangling me up in useless mysteries. Will you not be frank?"

She did not reply.

"You wished me to find out who killed Berwyn Kennedy," he went on, after a pause; "but you do not help me. I will be frank with you, although you are not so with me. To-day I have discovered many things. I do not know whether Edna Heathcote is guilty or innocent. If she is guilty, she is a very bold woman; if she is innocent, she is being blackmailed by a set of the—I beg your pardon—of scoundrels. I have letters in my pocket that prove this. To-night I received a hint that these blackguards foregather yonder in Galuzzo. I went there, and find—my God!—I find you among them! Giulietta, will you not explain this to me?"

He spoke quietly, pleadingly; but the girl was silent. She dared not trust herself to speak. She felt that she must throw herself on his breast and bid him put his arms about her close, very close, and save her from those dark shadows that seemed starting up about her. How strong

ne was ! He had carried her as though she were a child. If he could only carry her on and on, out of this turmoil of darkness and crime, if——

Then she heard again his low, pleading voice.

“Giulietta,” he was saying, “will you not tell me ? God knows you can find no truer friend to trust—no one who loves you better, no one who would give up life more readily for your sake ! Giulietta, do not kill my trust in you !”

She could have cried out in her great agony. Then she would have told him everything, but all about her rose those black shadows of the *Mafia*, unknown, menacing, terrible. Her courage left her. She could only cower there in the corner and pray and pray—the same words repeated again and again. They came to her hollow and dull, like echoes of the convent-halls,—

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the day of our death. Amen.”

“You will not kill my trust in you ?” he repeated.

“I would rather die,” she whispered brokenly.

“Then you will tell me,” he cried eagerly ; “why were you there ? Why was your guardian there ? Who are these people ?”

“I think,” she said, as one who had been musing, “that if I loved any one, I should trust that one in spite of everything. If the world stood up and said he was base and wicked, still would I trust him ; if he came to me with his hands all red with blood and said, ‘See, I have killed a man !’ still would I trust him.”

“Giulietta, I——”

“Yes, I would trust him,” she went on, in the same quiet way, as though she were reading the words from a book ; “and love him faithfully. If men told me he was infamous, I would not believe them. If black shadows crowded about him, and pointed at him and screamed, ‘He is infamous !’ I would not believe them. I should take his hand before them all, and say, ‘I trust you, and I love you ; and what you have done is right and just !’ Yes, and if his hand was red with blood, I would kiss his hand with my lips, and say, ‘I trust you, and you are innocent.’”

“Giulietta !”

"You would not say that," she said, smiling sadly. "I do not think men love and trust as women do."

Now they were rattling through the streets of Florence: the lights from late windows flashing on them fitfully, the tired horse galloping on under the persistent lash.

Jack gave the address of his hotel.

A few moments later the carriage stopped. Jack emptied his purse into the coachman's hand.

"Thank you," he said. "Good-night."

"*Buon' notte, Eccellenza!*"

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAMNING EVIDENCE.

JACK CHARTERIS passed a sleepless night—for the first time in a quarter of a century, at least. One cannot be sure about those first two years of his life.

When the carriage rolled away Jack and Giulietta entered the hotel in silence. In silence they mounted the stairs. In the corridor they parted abruptly, with a murmured good-night.

Jack went to his room. For the first time for many years, he did not fill his pipe for a "night-cap smoke." He threw open the windows, and leaned far out into the blue, star-lit night. The wind, tinged with the shrewd air from the far Apennines, beat on his face and blew back his hair. He was a big, strong, "matter-of-fact chap," as he would have said, and he took things as he found them. He knew nothing about that horrible word, which Dean Trench objected to so strongly—emotionalism. But to-night all the depths of his being were stirred—he loved and suffered. To love and to suffer is the doom of every man, and will be as long as there are women in the world. Jack Charteris was learning this lesson, as we have all learned it, and may again.

Giulietta had come into his everyday life like—he knew not what—like a storm-wind, dark and troubled, but bearing odours of oleanders of the south-land. And now he loved her; for even in this age of frock-coats and top-hats men love. One always typifies the woman one loves. To him Giulietta was a white, pure, fleeting thing—a ray of clear hope flying through this naughty world. Jack Charteris was not poetical, but he wrote verses, and he thought of Giulietta in almost the words ascribed to him. He had loved her so well that he was sure she must know it. Perhaps that was masculine conceit, but the

longer he brooded over it the more certain he was that she knew of his love. Then what an unfair advantage she had taken! He had been loyal and true to her, and she had deceived him. His faith in her was dead; his trust in her was gone. She was to him no more the little "convent-girl," with big, entreating eyes, and pretty, tragic ways—this girl had died. In her stead had risen a woman, intriguing, designing. And for some reason of her own this woman had thrown him into this vortex of crime and shame. She had used him as an instrument—for what purpose he knew not. He had been a key in her hands to open a door, and beyond was a room dark with mystery; he had been a puppet dancing to the strings she pulled. These were bitter thoughts.

"Good God!" he cried, staggering from the window to the table, and burying his face in his hands; "how she has deceived me, and how I love her!"

"And how I love her!" he kept repeating to himself foolishly, mechanically, hopelessly.

He rose from the table and paced up and down the room. Then he tried to smoke, took a book and tried to read—the page was a tangle of grey lines, and then it seemed as though her face was mirrored on every page. No matter where he looked, her eyes shone before him—soft, tearful, entreating.

And yet he could not shut out the growing conviction that she was implicated in this strange murder to which he had given days and nights. And yet, he said to himself, she herself asked me to unravel this tangled web; she—Then the circumstances crowded upon him: her connection with Montecinqe, with those *Mafian* pickpockets, blackmailers and cut-throats. She must know, he thought; Jack did not dare to dwell upon the extent of her knowledge. He tried to put this and that together; he could not think sanely. His brain was a windy darkness—the dead man, Mrs. Heathcote, Montecinqe, Giulietta whirled there like spectres. Then he remembered the account that Giosue Trinci, the fat *carabiniere*, had given him. Who was the woman this man Kennedy had visited at the Pension Bellini? His wife? Or had he loved Giulietta, and—

But this questioning was futile and maddening.

Jack Charteris threw himself face downward on the bed; he dared not meet his thoughts.

And so the night went by. The young stars faded away in the mist of the younger dawn; morning broke over the sleeping city. Jack roused himself and blew out his candle—it was flickering blue in the socket. He threw off his clothes and took a cold bath; then he felt better. He dressed himself and went below. The drowsy porter was sleeping at the desk; he wakened him and went out into the grey, empty streets. Chance directed his footsteps. He paid no attention to the streets he followed. He walked on hurriedly, impatiently, with that feverish need for physical exertion that comes to every strong man when “the worms are gnawing at his brain.” Luck led the way. He was on the long white road that leads to Fiesole and the hills that crouch like bullocks with threatening foreheads toward Florence. He did not know it, but, by one of those odd coincidences that fate tosses down every now and again on the chess-board of life, he was following the path that Berwyn Kennedy had taken the morning he resolved to leave Florence.

He reached the church, in the old cloisters of which Fra Angelico once prayed, and looked back. In the valley of the Arno the new light of the morning brooded like a reflection of the old monk-painter’s prayers. Berwyn Kennedy had seen a dawn like this. There about him rose the same hills; the vines murmured, as of old, and there was a low singing in the trees. Like Kennedy, he threw himself on the dusty, burnt grass by the roadside, and, like the dead man, he thought of a girl’s face, and it was the face of Giulietta.

This was one of fate’s plagiarisms, but not the most singular.

When he went on to the little town, that lies like an eagle’s nest on the folded crest of the hill, he saw the open doors of *Feruccio’s*, and entered and ordered a pot of coffee and a basket of rolls. He was served by a sleepy waiter in a soiled linen apron. After breakfasting he walked on, and, as the dead man had done, he made a resolution. He would go away; he would leave behind him this Florence, with its golden seductions and its shadowy crimes; he

would go far away into the keen, cold air of the north-land, where the lines of truth are clean-cut and sharp—like those of a white statue.

He could do nothing else: he dared not remain; he dared not lift the veil of the mystery, for he feared what might be revealed. Back in the darkness there, he felt, love and crime must battle for the victory. This was all alien to Jack Charteris; his frank, honest nature recoiled from these red, hidden crimes and intrigues. Not that his love was less; he loved so well that he dared not trust himself near her—near her who seemed to hold in her hand the clue to all this evil business. No! He would go away, he would never see her again; he would leave her alone in the guilt and silence in which she had wrapped herself; he would go away, and, leaving her, save his manhood.

Braced up to this resolution, Jack Charteris made his way back to the hotel. On one of the benches in the office a man was waiting for him—a small, wizened, apologetic old man, dressed in black clothes, like a servant. Jack had seen that face—like a withered apple—before; of this he was sure. At the *trattoria* in Galuzzo? At Heathcote's, of course. Yes, he remembered; this was the servant who had thrust him out of doors, so to speak. He wondered what this fellow could have to do with him.

"A message for the signore," Tito Ciuti said, handing Jack a letter.

"For me?"

"*Si*, signore, for you," Tito replied, bowing.

"Is there an answer?" Jack inquired, breaking the seal and tearing open the envelope.

There was no answer, and Jack looked up. The man was gone.

"The beggar must have been in a hurry," he said to himself, and sauntered off to the smoking-room. There was no one in this room, and he threw himself into a chair and unfolded the letter. He read it; but, at first, the words had no meaning for him. Then he read it half-aloud, as a boy cons Latin verses. Of a sudden the words stood out like fire.

"You must be right. I will keep my oath: I will kill Berwyn Kennedy to-night. Pray God that I may die!

"Giulietta."

When Jack Charteris understood this it seemed as though a pain grew about his heart—gripped it like a strong man's hand. He rose and walked up and down; that relieved the tension of brain and heart. When he grew calmer he re-read the letter. On second thought, he saw the affair in a different light. When he had had no proof of Giulietta's guilt, he had suspected; but now when he held in his hand what purported to be a positive proof, he thought her innocent. The proof was too positive, too apt, too convincing. And it had come from Mrs. Heathcote's servant.

"It is a plot of that woman's contriving," Jack said, under his breath; "or of that devil Montecinqe. I will see the thing through."

He wondered how he had ever been able to suspect Giulietta. Her words of the night before came back to him, and half to himself he repeated, "If I loved any one, I think that I should love him in spite of everything; if the world stood up and said that he was base and wicked, still would I trust him."

With these words echoing in his heart he went upstairs to the drawing-room that he had engaged and sent a maid to Giulietta, requesting her to come to him. How long he waited he did not know. He seated himself in an easy-chair, and lay back with closed, tired eyes. He was roused by a light touch on his arm. He looked up: Giulietta stood beside him. She was white and heavy-eyed, but her face was full of tenderness. She did not speak at once, but she let her hand rest on his arm. They looked at each other in silence.

"Giulietta!" he whispered, after a long pause; then he took the slight, white hand that rested on his arm and held it in his own.

"Shall I go away?" he asked.

The hand he held closed round his own, but Giulietta made no answer.

"I have thought it all over," he went on; "and it seems to be the only thing to do."

He had not meant to say this; he had intended to show her the letter, and then—— But he sat there and held her hand and talked at random.

"If I were a thousand miles away we could not be farther apart than we are with this—this thing between us."

Still she made no response, but her hand clung closer to his. Then Jack rose and stood before her.

"Giulietta," he said, "you leave me no other alternative: I *must* go."

As a matter of fact, he had not the slightest intention of going away. On the contrary, he had made up his mind to do nothing of the kind. But he made the remark as though he meant it, so it amounted to the same thing.

"No," the girl replied brokenly; "I do not believe that you will go away—I will not think it."

"You force me to it," he said; "what am I to think? You will not speak, you will explain nothing. What am I to do?" he concluded impatiently.

"Trust me," she said gently. "There is nothing I can say that would explain away the mystery of this man's death. If my guardian did not kill him, I know of no one else whom I could accuse. Last night"—she caught her breath and went on hurriedly—"there is nothing to tell about last night. I went where he took me."

"Why?" Jack asked shortly.

"He frightened me; he threatened me."

"With what did he threaten you?"

"With bringing those—those men here."

"Oh, that was it, was it?" Jack said; "one word more, Giulietta. Why are you afraid of this Montecinque? Has he any hold on you of which I know nothing?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Is it this?" he asked quietly, taking the letter he had just received and handing it to her.

"That!" she cried passionately; "he—I—oh, my God!"

She sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. Jack bent over her a moment.

"Look," he said, and lighting a match he burned the paper; "you will have nothing to fear from him now. That ends the affair."

She tried to speak, but could not; a great struggle was going on within her.

"Come," he said.

"Do you believe I killed this man?" she inquired suddenly, turning her white, tear-stained face up to his.

"No," said Jack promptly; "I do not."

"I will tell you about it," she began. He protested—he did not wish to hear, he trusted her. But she told her story, brokenly, incoherently. She related how she had taken the oath of the *Mafia*; how, believing that Kennedy had sworn away her brother's life, she intended to kill him; how she had fled—only to learn that the deed she dared not do had been done by another. Jack listened quietly, attentively. When she had finished he took out his pipe and filled it.

"Find me the guilty one," she said, with a sudden appeal.

"I intend to do that very thing," he replied.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT.

MR. JACK CHARTERIS decided to find out—and this was the first step—how the incriminatory letter had come into Tito Ciuti's possession. He went at once to the Pension Bellini, and by chance the old servant answered his knock.

"Mrs. Heathcote is not at home," Tito Ciuti said apologetically.

"My good man, I did not come to see Mrs. Heathcote," Jack answered. "I want you."

Tito Ciuti smiled submissively.

"I am quite at your orders," he replied.

"Get your hat and come out; I will wait."

Ciuti went for his hat, and in a few moments returned. Jack did not speak again; he walked rapidly back to his hotel, and the old servant followed him. They went up to Jack's room.

"Sit down," Jack said.

The old man did so; he held his hat in his hand and fastened his sunken eyes on the floor. His submission and docility touched Jack. There was something almost pathetic in his silent obedience. He was a very old man too, and his face was lined and wrinkled, and his hair was white. There was a decanter on the table, and Jack gave the old man a glass of brandy. Ciuti drank it eagerly. It seemed to give him courage; he looked up and said, "What does the signore require of me?"

"I want to know if there is an answer," Jack said, "to the letter you brought me this morning from your mistress, Mrs. Heathcote?"

Ciuti half started from his chair. He looked stupidly at Jack for a moment, and then rose.

"The signore is mistaken," he said nervously, "all mistaken. Mistress Heathcote did not give me the letter."

"Sit down, my good man," Jack said, and the old man, ill at ease, obeyed. "Your name is Ciuti, is it not?"

The old man nodded assent.

"There is no use denying that Mrs. Heathcote sent that letter," Jack went on quietly; "you are a faithful servant, and doubtless would go to any length to serve her, but in this case a lie will not serve her. Now I know that the lady whom that letter accuses is perfectly innocent; I know that she had no motive for such an infamous act."

"It was an act of vengeance," the old man explained, in a firm voice; "she avenged her brother."

"You seem well informed," Jack replied, "but your facts are distorted. Kennedy had almost nothing to do with her brother's imprisonment. If he was unjustly convicted some one else is responsible. We will not discuss that, my good fellow, at present, but the part Montecinque played is public property."

"Montecinque?"

"Ah! perhaps you know this excellent Montecinque?"

"A little; he came to the house; he was the guardian of Signorina Rombinino."

"Your information is exact," said Jack; he filled his pipe, lit it, and leaned against the table, looking down at the old man, and smoking indolently; "but I am only the more surprised that you should imagine Signorina Rombinino guilty of Kennedy's murder. Doubtless you know that Mrs. Heathcote killed him."

"It is a lie! a lie!" the old servant cried harshly; "she had nothing to do with it or with him."

"There you are wrong again, Ciuti," Jack said calmly; "she had a great deal to do with him: she was his wife."

"Mother of God!" he half screamed; "how do you know that?"

His hat rolled to the floor unheeded.

"Don't excite yourself. I know more than that. She killed him, and you know all about it."

Tito Ciuti sprang to his feet; his bent form was drawn almost erect.

"The Signorina Rombinino did that," he declared; "it

was she—she—the signorina. I heard her take the oath. Then she wrote—the signore himself has seen the letter! Faith of God! can the signore doubt what he has seen for himself?”

Tito Ciuti stooped and picked up his hat; then he moved toward the door. Jack stopped him with a gesture.

“Sit down,” he ordered calmly; “I have more to say. Take another glass of brandy, here.”

The old servant emptied the glass; then he resumed his seat.

“If you heard Signorina Rombinino take an oath, you were present at a meeting of the *Mafia*,” Jack Charteris continued. “Are you one of those ‘confederates’?”

“And if I am?” Ciuti returned, shrugging his shoulders.

“I thought I saw you at Galuzzo last night,” Jack added.

Ciuti made no response to this surmise; he shrugged his shoulders again.

“No, my good fellow,” Jack resumed, after a pause, “Kennedy was not killed because he had anything to do with the conviction of Gaetano Rombinino. He was killed because he was the husband of Mrs. Edna Heathcote—as she called herself. Do you follow me? Good. He was killed because his presence in Florence was a menace to the Heathcotes. Captain Heathcote——”

Ciuti paled when the Captain was mentioned: he was faithful as a dog; he would have lain down his life at his master’s bidding.

“Captain Heathcote,” Jack continued, “and Mrs. Heathcote had another reason for sending Kennedy to a better world. At his death a large fortune fell to them. And, of course, they were free to marry: It is evident, is it not, that they had excellent reasons for wishing him out of the way?”

Tito Ciuti sat like one turned to stone; his face was livid and his eyes were set. Jack pitied him.

“I propose to see justice done,” he resumed; “I shall not allow Signorina Rombinino, who is perfectly innocent, to rest under this imputation. I shall bring the guilty ones to justice. I do not accuse your master or mistress of

having done the deed; but their guilt is only the more dastardly if they hired some of your blackguard confederates to do it. It is through these cut-throats who call themselves the *Mafia* that I have been able to discover the complicity of the Heathcotes in the crime."

Jack watched the old man shrewdly; he was sure that he knew the secret of that evil crime; but Tito Ciuti made no sign.

"I have some of their letters here," the young man went on, producing the packet which Edna had thrown at his feet. "They were sent to Mrs. Heathcote, and they proclaim her connection with the murder, and demand two-thirds of the fortune which has come to her by Kennedy's death as the price of silence. Pleasant people, these friends of yours, Ciuti! Do you believe me? Will you read them?"

Ciuti leaped to his feet like a wild boar prodded with a spear; his face was distorted with passion.

"He—he"—the old man screamed hoarsely—"he has betrayed me! he has betrayed me! lied and cheated! He is a devil! Mother of God! he is *the* devil!"

Jack forced him down into a chair.

"I agree with you," he said.

"A devil!" the old man repeated, his frame shaken with rage and passion.

"Why did he want to get Kennedy out of the way? What had he against him?"

"He is a devil!" the old man muttered; "this Montecinq, he is a devil!"

"Undoubtedly; but how did he know the details of Mrs. Heathcote's early life and her connection with Kennedy?"

"I—I!" the old man cried, in a tempest of agony and rage, "it was I—I told him—I—I, Ciuti—the servant—the friend—the dog—the slave! I betrayed the master whom I have served, and followed, and loved."

He broke down; sobs choked him.

"And I wished to save him! and now they threaten him with my crime! The devils! oh! body of God! the devils! I can die. I have betrayed him; now I can die."

Jack Charteris drew a long breath.

"So you killed Berwyn Kennedy?" he said quietly.

"Why not?" the old man said; "since he was an enemy, since he came to destroy."

He buried his face in his hands.

"So it was you?" Jack said.

"It was I," Ciuti went on. "I confess to you; why should I not? It cannot matter now. He came, and my master said to me—to me, his old friend and servant, his faithful dog—'My trouble has come upon me again.' It was always thus. And my mistress laughed, but her heart was heavy with fear. Then I hated him. I saw him often in the street, and I knew that he was a curse and must die. But I am an old man; he was young and strong. I am an Italian: I knew there were men who would do this deed; I sought for them cautiously; I went to the *Mafia*. I was taken to Montecinque. He would not listen, he would not hear me until I had taken the oath. Then I was one of them; he said I was his brother. Body of God!" he cried abruptly, with a superstitious shudder, "I am brother to the devil!"

"Go on!" Jack said sternly.

"Then I told him of my enemy. He questioned me; he is the chief. 'I must know all,' he told me, 'or I cannot act; but you are safe to speak, for the *Mafia* is like the confessional—it has ears but no voice.' This he said," the old man went on; "and I betrayed my master. I told him everything. He promised it should be done—the man should die. There was a meeting of the *Mafia*, and the lots were cast: she, the signorina, was to do the deed."

"Drink this," said Jack, pouring out yet another glass of brandy.

The old man drank it, and went on.

"She, the signorina, was living in the Pension Bellini; and I watched her. I feared she would fail. Once she was alone with the man, and she did not kill him. Then one night she meant to do it: she wrote down her promise on paper; she sent me to her guardian with the paper. I read it on the way, and I came back joyous. I saw her leave the house, and I followed her, for I wished to be sure that she did not fail. And she—she went through the city to the railway station; and then I knew that she was a coward, and would flee.

"I could not wait ; he had lived too long.

"I went to his house when all was still. I crept upstairs ; I found his room ; I entered through the window ; I killed him. All night I hid beneath the stairs in the lower hall. When the street-doors were opened in the morning I went away, and no one saw me. That is all."

Jack pushed the brandy decanter again towards him.

"Wait ; I will write this down," he said ; "it may save your master and mistress. Will you sign it ?"

"I will do anything you bid me, signore," Ciuti said, in his old submissive way.

Jack wrote out the confession in brief ; then he rang for a waiter, and bade the man witness Ciuti's signature. When the document was properly attested, and the waiter had left the room, the old man looked about him stupidly for a moment. Then he stooped and picked up his hat.

"Where are you going ?" Jack asked.

"I do not know," he said vacantly, turning his hat in his trembling hands.

"Home ?"

"I cannot," he replied ; "I——"

"Ciuti," Jack said brusquely, "you have killed an innocent man, you are guilty of a dastardly crime ; but I'll be d——d if I hang a man for standing by his master ! Here is some money ; take it ! and go off somewhere and drown yourself, or do as you please. Get out !"

He put the gold in the old man's hand, and pushed him out into the hall. Then he closed the door.

"I suppose that's all wrong," he muttered. "But I couldn't help myself ; let the poor devil go. He has proved her innocence, and that is enough for me."

CHAPTER XXV.

CHECKMATE OF MONTECINQUE.

It was evident that Montecinque's thoughts were agreeable. He was seated in front of a wood fire that snapped and sparkled gaily; he puffed at his cigarette and smiled to himself. At last he got up and pulled a bell-cord that hung near the mantelpiece.

"Now you may show the gentleman into this room," he said to the servant who appeared.

"Yes, signore."

A moment later Jack Charteris entered the room, and Montecinque rose to receive him.

"I am grieved that I kept you waiting."

"It does not matter," Jack said. "And now, Signore Montecinque, I wish to see you on a matter of business."

"You will be seated? Thank you. And now as to this business?" Montecinque observed suavely. "No matter what it is, I can only welcome it; it has procured me the honour of this visit."

"Yes, it has procured you the honour of this visit," Jack repeated drily. "You sent me a letter this morning, Signore Montecinque; I have come to ask an explanation."

"A letter?" Montecinque drawled.

"There is no use beating about the bush," Jack said impatiently; "I know all about the letter."

"Then," Montecinque replied, "why request an explanation?"

"I wish to know why you sent it to me?" Jack demanded.

"Ah! a question of motives, is it? I never explain my motives," Montecinque said, twisting up his bristling moustache; "you may attribute to me any motive you

please. Shall we say that affection for you dictated the action? shall we say that I wished you to know the truth?"

"An unnatural supposition," Jack said grimly.

"That may be," the other replied indolently. "Perhaps we had better say that I disapprove of the intimacy that apparently exists between you and my ward. Is that unnatural? Suppose that I had gathered the notion—I do not say from your manners—that you are an English gentleman, and, being under the impression that English gentlemen do not marry young women who are addicted to murder, I had sent you the proof of my unfortunate ward's—shall I say crime? Does that appear to be an unreasonable motive?"

"Not altogether unreasonable," Jack answered curtly. "I am willing to assume it."

"Very well," Montecinque went on easily; "it would follow, would it not, that I believed this proof of my unfortunate ward's crime would interfere with the intimacy existing between you?"

"Doubtless that was your belief."

"And well grounded?"

"No," said Jack; "quite false."

"Ah," Montecinque drawled, "that is very unfortunate for my poor ward. Moreover, it shows that I was wrong in my supposition that you were a gentleman. Pardon me!"

"I say, you know, Signore Montecinque," said Jack, "I can't be always knocking you down."

An ugly look darkened the Italian's face; then he laughed aloud.

"You are crude," he said, "very crude. This is very unfortunate, as I said, for my poor ward. Had you been a man of—shall I say finer instincts?—the poor girl would not be in her present sad position."

Jack Charteris had recovered his equable good-humour; he smiled, and requested Montecinque to continue.

"You may have perceived that I disapprove of you. Yes? Very good. And I object to your intimacy with my ward; and if it does not cease, I fear that the poor child will have to answer for killing that Englishman. Or was he a Scotchman? It is the same thing, is it not? I am not thoroughly acquainted with the distinction."

"Of course, your evidence against Signorina Rombinino is conclusive?"

"To be sure; the paper I sent to you was a mere trifle; unfortunately, there are eye-witnesses. I have kept them quiet; but in case this objectionable intimacy continues I fear I shall be unable to do so."

"The game seems to be in your hands," said Jack calmly.

"I do not ask you to accept this statement; I wish you to be sure that what I say is true," Montecinqe went on, and he rose and rang the bell. In answer to the ring a man shambled into the room, a broad-backed, cringing man, with furtive eyes and a sallow face.

"One of your witnesses?" asked Jack.

"Tell this gentleman what you know of the Englishman's murder," Montecinqe said to him, without paying any heed to Jack's question.

"Yes, signore," the man said, and went on in a husky, dull voice; "your excellency told me to follow signorina from your house that night, as she seemed excited, and you feared she might——"

"Never mind all the particulars, go on."

"Yes, signore. I followed her; she went to the Pension Bellini; I waited. She came out, and I followed her. She went to the house of the Englishman, and I followed her. She went in, up the stairs, through the passage. I hid in a corner of the *loggia* that adjoined the room of the Englishman. She killed him. As she came out she threw down a knife; I——"

"Only one witness?" asked Jack.

"There is another witness, quite independent," Montecinqe said; "but——"

Jack laughed with quiet amusement.

"Send that dog out of the room," he said; "his galley-face would hang him any day. I have something to say to you."

With a gesture Montecinqe dismissed the servant; then he looked at Jack quietly, keenly, with a dangerous light in his half-veiled eyes.

"Oh," he said slowly, "you do not believe this honest man?"

"Is it one of your scoundrels of the *Mafia*?"

"She has told you?" the Italian asked, and his voice trembled with suppressed emotion.

"It is true," said Jack carelessly, "that I know something of your cut-throats. I was at Galuzzo last night; but perhaps you have forgotten that."

Montecinque had recovered his nonchalance.

"You know something of the *Mafia*?" he said; "then you know that she is guilty. And as for the proof? You know how much is necessary. But that makes no difference."

"Of course, you know that servant of yours lied a moment ago."

"To be sure; but what does it matter?" and Montecinque shrugged his eloquent shoulders; "it does not help your case at all."

"And, of course, you know who killed the Englishman?"

"Your reference to my ward is indelicate for a lover," the Italian said smoothly, rolling a cigarette with his long, dainty fingers.

"I was not referring to Signorina Rombinino," Jack replied shortly. "I see that you are not as well informed as I imagined."

Montecinque showed no sign of emotion; he waited.

"And to information," Jack continued, "I may add advice—when you are cheating, don't cheat your confederates. You know Tito Ciuti? To be sure. Well, he killed Berwyn Kennedy."

Montecinque gave no outward sign of surprise; he smoked his cigarette placidly.

"You betrayed him, and he has betrayed you—your blackmailing scheme and all."

The Italian threw his half-smoked cigarette into the fire. Oddly enough, he did not doubt the truth of Jack's statement. This was odd, for a scoundrel is always looking for a lie. He believed now that his ward was innocent. He looked over the other cards in his hand.

"I fear," said Jack, "that your two suppositious murderers—I am the possessor, by the way, of your letters to Mrs. Heathcote—are not of much use to you, now that the real murderer has come forward."

Montecinqe rolled another cigarette, lit it, and smoked for awhile in silence. At last he said: "For the sake of argument, I am willing to accept your version of this interesting case. Am I at liberty to assume that you intend to marry my ward?"

"I shall marry Miss Rombinino," said Jack.

"You are aware that her fortune is insignificant—nothing, in fact?" the other asked.

"That does not make any difference," Jack said; "but, as a matter of fact, I know that she will possess a large property."

"You jump at conclusions," said Montecinqe coolly; "you forget that I have been the trustee of this property, and that—my tastes are expensive."

"How much have you stolen?" Jack asked abruptly.

"You are—may I say it?—a trifle crude," the Italian observed gently; "but I might say that there is nothing left. Otherwise I should not have mixed myself up in this Heathcote affair. Personally, I am opposed to blackmailing women; perhaps I am over-sensitive; but it—well, leaves a bad taste in the mouth."

Jack dug his fingers into the palms of his hands; it was all he could do to keep himself from choking the imperturbable scoundrel.

Montecinqe continued: "All that I can give you with my dear ward—as I fear this Heathcote business has fallen through—is a guardian's blessing. Doubtless you could annoy me about those business affairs—the property and all that. I am not a business man, and do not know. Under the circumstances, I do not think you will do so. My unfortunate ward has been very imprudent, you must admit; and I do not imagine your estimable family would care to have the whole story dragged into the light. Her connection with my friends—the cut-throats, as you called them with much justice—is not the best introduction to English society, I take it.

"You are a clever young man," he went on glibly; "you have succeeded so far; but I think you will agree with me that you would only soil your hands by fighting me and—the *Mafia*. As you have said, we have a different standard of morality from the one you keep yourself to. Those were

not your words, I believe, but I think they express your opinion."

Jack Charteris stood up, and looked down on Montecinque much as he might have looked on a serpent—all slime and cunning—that had crawled across his path.

"Yes," he said, "this is the end; I shall leave you to find your own way to the gallows."

"In other words," Montecinque retorted, with a low laugh, "you are reasonable. Can you find your way out alone? Yes? Good-night."

Jack did not answer; he walked out—into the golden air that brooded in the streets of Florence.

After he was gone Montecinque laughed again, and then his brows contracted with sudden anger. He summoned his servant.

"Yes, signore."

"Tito Ciuti has been indiscreet."

"Yes, signore."

In those few words lurked the old servant's death-warrant. The *Mafia* has a short way with traitors.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.”

EVEN in these days of kid-glove propriety, when every one admits that love is not only ridiculous but bad form as well, there are certain reckless young people who persist in falling in love and marrying in the old-fashioned way. Jack Charteris was one of these defiant young people, and one violates no confidence in saying that Giulietta was another. And perhaps they were not as foolish as the man of the world and that charming woman, his wife, would have one believe.

Their wooing was not of the every-day sort, but it led them into a life that was sunny with constant love and glad with the prattle and laughter of children. After all, one can look forward to nothing better.

Jack and Giulietta did not say much about the love that grew up between them; as a matter of fact, love that is given to words is usually theatrical and unreal. The best love, like the best asparagus, grows out of sight.

After leaving Montecinque, Jack walked back to the little hotel in the Via Montebello. Mrs. Charteris and She—Jack capitalized this very personal pronoun from this time forward—were sitting in the little drawing-room. Giulietta met him at the door, and he took her hand and led her into the room.

“Jack,” Mrs. Charteris said, “are you not ashamed of yourself—deserting two lonely women as you have done?”

“*Mater*,” said Jack, “I am sorry to say I’m not wearing sackcloth and ashes. I have a great many things to tell you, but they shall be said another time. Just now, I——”

“Well?” Mrs. Charteris asked, regarding the glowing young couple with well-simulated surprise.

"Just now" he went on, "I—I was about to remark, *mater*, that——"

"I'm sure, I do not understand," said Giulietta, with flushed gravity.

"You know that I love you, don't you?" Jack asked reproachfully; "well, that's all there is to know."

"As for that——"

"Well, don't stop at that obscure point," Jack remarked, bending down his face toward hers.

"I knew that long ago," she murmured.

Then Mrs. Charteris stood up and took the young girl in her arms and kissed her.

"You would have been blind," she said quietly, "had you not done so."

"Here, *mater*," Jack said, assuming an air of offended dignity; "I hope you don't mean to suggest that I have been wearing my heart on my sleeve?"

Then——

It was the inevitable "then," that comes to all sensible young people. The train that left Florence two days later went rattling on through Lombardy valleys and Alpine tunnels into the green fields of France—bore them away to a new life, and the black and troubled past became like the shadow of a dream.

But before those two hurried days passed Jack Charteris had many things to do. And first of all he looked up a lawyer—a shrewd, beagle-faced, little LL.D., who had all the Pandicts at his fingers'-ends. The result of this was that the excellent Montecinqe saw matters in a different light, and made arrangements whereby Giulietta received the ruins of the large fortune that her father had entrusted to him. The money that he had squandered—his tastes were expensive, as he said—was beyond recall. But there was enough left to give Giulietta a dower that seemed to Florentine eyes, at all events, large and splendid; the lands on the Tuscan hills, in spite of the mortgages on them, were sold to advantage; and the estate along the Arno brought in a steady income.

Florence knew Montecinqe no more for ever; he went away, and was lost in the limbo of anonymous rascality.

Jack Charteris wrote to Mrs. Heathcote, and explained

the "Kennedy mystery," and added an apology—the best he could make—for his blundering accusation. He was not surprised that he failed to get a reply. A woman never forgives a man for knowing too much. In after years he heard of the Heathcotes very often. They returned to England, and Edna gained a prominent place in that "set" that is advertised in "society-papers," and that is referred to as "smart." There could be no doubt that Mrs. Heathcote was enjoying the fortune that might, under happier circumstances, have fallen to Berwyn Kennedy.

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THE END.

Edinburgh, August 1892.

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